

# **PROMOTING READING DEVELOPMENT OF BEGINNER READERS IN THE UMLAZI DISTRICT OF KWAZULU NATAL**

**by**

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that PROMOTING READING DEVELOPMENT OF BEGINNER READERS IN THE UMLAZI DISTRICT OF KWAZULU NATAL is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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J.M. STOLTZ

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DATE

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# **Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of KwaZulu Natal**

## **Abstract**

The teacher's knowledge and instructional expertise are vital for the reading development of beginner readers. This study investigated the daily activities of teachers and learners, which promote the development of beginner reading in the Umlazi District, KwaZulu Natal. A literature study on theoretical frameworks that influence a teacher's reading instruction practices, policies that guide reading instruction, and the main curriculum components of beginner reading instruction within the South African context informed a classroom ethnography study conducted in a purposefully selected Grade 1 class in the Umlazi District, Kwazulu Natal. Detailed observation of the instruction of beginner reading, interviews with the teacher, the Head of Department, the parents and the learners were used to gather the data. Key findings indicated that a knowledgeable teacher who plans a variety of activities around the key components of beginner reading (reading and sight words, phonics, vocabulary, phonemic awareness and comprehension) and accommodates the diverse needs of all the learners is essential to promote beginner reading.

Key words: beginner reading instruction, Grade 1, classroom ethnography, Kwazulu Natal

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
ESL	English Second Language Learners
HL	Home Language
LiEP	Language in Education Policy
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
NEEDU	National Education Evaluation and Development Unit
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SASA	South African Schools Act
THRASS	Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **BACKGROUND, PROBLEM FORMULATION AND AIMS**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

In South Africa every year thousands of young learners transition from Grade R to Grade 1 and begin their formal journey in education (DBE 2012a:9). Learning to read is an important part of this journey. Reading is a vital skill necessary for all academic subjects (Jennings, Schudt-Caldwell & Lerner 2010:4). Woolfolk (2010:56) describes reading as the “cornerstone of learning”. Without the ability to read, academic success is limited as it is believed that “children must learn to read so that later they can read to learn” (Jennings et al. 2010:4-5). Reading is not only used for academic purposes but also for pleasure. It has the power to enrich learners’ lives as they can read about topics that fascinate and interest them (Barr, Blachowicz, Bates, Katz & Kaufman 2013:3).

International and national assessments indicate that many young South African learners do not learn how to read at an acceptable level. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Howie, van Staden, Tshele, Dowse & Zimmerman 2012: XV) tested South African Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners in 2006 and also in 2011. The studies focused on two purposes of reading: (1) reading for literary experience, and (2) reading to acquire and use information. The PIRLS 2006 (Howie, Venter, van Staden, Zimmerman, Long, Scherman & Archer 2007:6) study revealed that South African learners achieved the lowest scores of all the participating countries. The results also showed that approximately 80% of the learners failed to achieve the Low International benchmark, indicating that these learners had not acquired the basic reading skills (ibid.). Due to the poor 2006 results, the 2011 PIRLS were slightly different. The Grade 4 learners wrote an easier, shorter pre-PIRLS in all 11 official languages, and the Grade 5 learners wrote a PIRLS in English and Afrikaans only (ibid). Learners who wrote the PIRLS in English and Afrikaans in 2006 scored 403 (12.4) points and 421 (7.3) in the 2011 PIRLS study; not a “statistically significant” improvement (Howie et al. 2012:41). The 2011 pre-PIRLS written by the Grade 4 learners revealed that approximately 29% could not reach the Low International benchmark, and only 6% reached the Advanced International benchmark (Howie et al. 2012:47). The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) assesses the trends in the

reading and mathematics achievement levels of Grade 6 learners (SACMEQ 2007). This study indicated that 25% of these learners (in South Africa) are functionally illiterate, indicating that they cannot extract meaning from a short and simple text (Spaull 2012:10). The study also indicated that there was not a significant improvement in the results from 2000 to 2007 (SACMEQ Policy Brief 2011:3).

Since 2008, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has annually conducted their own national standardised assessments in language and mathematics, called the Annual National Assessments (ANA) (DBE 2011a). The ANAs were designed to ascertain the areas of strength and weakness in the curriculum so that, among others, teachers could offer effective learning support for their learners (DBE 2015a:4). Although the Home Language National percentage had increased in Grade 3 from 52% in 2012 to 56% in 2014, there was still room for improvement (DBE 2015a:51, 60, 62). The 2015 ANAs were not written due to various concerns (relating to the frequency of the administration of the ANA, among others) voiced by several teacher unions. The DBE heard these concerns and suggested a Task Team be put together to re-model the ANA (DBE 2015b).

In the Annual Performance Plan 2012-2013 the DBE (2012b:8-9) stresses that it is the responsibility of the schools to better prepare the learners to read and that the emphasis should be on quality teaching and learning. Acknowledging the poor state of reading in South Africa, the DBE implemented many campaigns to improve reading, such as the Foundations for Learning Campaign (DoE 2008a), the National Reading Strategy in February 2008 (DoE 2008b), the Drop All and Read Campaign (DEAR) and the Quality Improvement, Development and Support Upliftment Programme (QIDS-UP), to name a few. The National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) was also established by Minister Angie Motshekga shortly after 2009. NEEDU has the task of providing accurate and analytical accounts of the state of schools in South Africa to the Minister of Education (NEEDU National Report 2013:4). One of several areas of interest of the NEEDU is evaluating and promoting the development of reading (ibid.). In the Province of KwaZulu Natal, where this study was conducted, the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education (KZN DoE) implemented a Literacy Improvement Plan for 2012 that included the goal of improving reading (KZN DoE 2012).

Despite the various programmes implemented by the DBE, learners in South Africa are still not able to read at an acceptable level (DBE 2013a:51). The teachers in the classroom are the vehicles used to implement a policy or curriculum. Research has shown that the teacher is vital in promoting and improving reading (Howie et al. 2012:93). The DoE (2008b:8) postulates that, “many foundation phase teachers have not been explicitly trained to teach reading.” Nel (2011:41-66) supports the need for improved teacher training in reading. Many teachers who do not have adequate knowledge of how to help learners who experience problems with reading tend to revert to rote teaching (DoE 2008b:8).

The teachers’ knowledge of reading instruction is a critical factor in the promotion of reading development. The teacher’s knowledge and instructional expertise have been related to reading achievement (Lyon & Weiser 2009:475). When the teachers do possess the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the needs of students who are struggling to learn to read, these students make significant progress (Podhajski, Mather, Nathan & Sammons 2009:406). When they understand a few key principles of reading instruction and how to apply them effectively they are better equipped to promote the good reading development of their learners (Shanker & Cockrum 2009:1). Knowing what children need to learn and knowing how to help those who are battling to learn, require high levels of teacher knowledge (Snow & Juel 2005:512). Those teachers who understand how typical reading development unfolds will be able to plan instruction that is effective for their learners (Invernizzi & Hayes 2011:205). This begs the question, “What do teachers need to know about the components of reading and reading instruction in order to be effective teachers of reading?”

The DBE (2011b:14) mentions the five main components of reading as:

- phonemic awareness;
- word recognition (sight words and phonics);
- comprehension;
- vocabulary; and
- fluency.

These components, among others, are part of a Balanced Approach to reading where aspects from the Whole Language (Word) Approach and the Phonic Approach are integrated to produce the best possible reading results (Snow & Juel 2005:510). There exists a plethora of research that supports the five components of reading listed above as important and relevant.

This study intends to define each component of reading clearly and to understand how teachers incorporate and use these components of reading with others they may be using in order to promote the development of reading.

Considering the importance of high quality instruction as integral to promoting the development of reading it is essential to discover what this entails. Reutzel and Cooter (2011:50-51) examined what researchers believe to be the characteristics of high quality literacy instruction.

They are:

- instructional balance – the teachers integrate explicit instruction into authentic reading and writing experiences;
- instructional scaffolding;
- working in the zone of proximal development;
- skills/concepts/strategies explicitly taught.

Archer and Hughes (2011:5) add the following one, namely

- optimize engaged time on task.

Not only do teachers need to know how and what to teach to promote reading development, but they also need to be mindful of the diverse needs of their learners. In South Africa learners come from different socio-economic, language, racial and ability groups, to name a few (DBE 2011c: 3). Although many learners exercise their right to education (RSA 1996a) most of the learners in South Africa attend schools where they learn in a language other than the language they speak at home (home language). Research shows that approximately only 9.6% of the South African population have English as their home language (Howie et al.



2012:9). The Language in Education policy (Lemmer 2010:231) recommends that learners in the Foundation Phase should be taught in their home language but this is not the reality for many South African learners. Learners who attend school where the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) is English but do not have English as their home language will be referred to as English Second Language Learners (ESL) (Nel 2005:150-1510).

## **1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

My motivation for this study was prompted by the gap in ethnographic classroom-based research dealing with the promotion of beginner reading development within the South African context (as initially established by a literature search). Several other recent studies (2011-2016) deal with beginner reading in South African schools. Hibbert and Crous (2011) explored the complexities of selecting appropriate reading material for beginner readers in the diverse multilingual classrooms of South Africa; Nchindila (2011) investigated the important role of phonological awareness in early childhood reading in English; Mbatha (2014) explored the use and benefits of mother tongue instruction by teachers who were qualified in a dual medium programme - the mother tongue (isiZulu) was used for teaching early literacy acquisition; Hugo (2011) investigated factors such as class size and teacher qualifications and how these impacted teaching reading, and explored teaching methods and problems that children face when learning to read; Nel, Mohangi, Krog and Stephens (2016) conducted exploratory research on Grade R literacy teaching and learning. This study explored factors, including low socio-economic conditions, English as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT), inadequate teaching strategies used to implement the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and barriers to learning. A university in China partnered with this study. Swart and Nathanson's study (2011) reported on the positive effects of an individualised literacy intervention for emergent (low progress readers and writers) literacy learners.

My study differs from the aforementioned studies as it is an ethnographic study that focuses on the daily activities that both the teacher and learners engage in to promote beginner reading. It incorporates a thorough review of how reading is taught according to the following components of reading, namely reading (including sight words), phonics (THRASS and alphabet knowledge), vocabulary, phonemic awareness and comprehension.

From a professional viewpoint, I was motivated to carry out this study on grounds of my position as a learning support teacher. I have been a teacher for sixteen years and a specialist learning support teacher for eight years. In this position I am deeply involved in offering learning support to learners who are experiencing barriers to learning. The majority of the learners I offer support to experience problems with reading. I concur with Le Roux's (2016) observation that many learners enter the Intermediate Phase with poor reading skills due to inadequate instruction in the Foundation Phase. These learners then struggle to cope with the academic demands because their reading skills are two or more years behind (Pretorius 2014:61).

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Against the background given above the main research question was formulated as follows: How can the reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of KwaZulu Natal be promoted?

The main research problem was sub-divided as follows:

- What theoretical perspectives inform reading and reading instruction and how can effective instructional strategies for beginner readers be described? How are the diverse needs of learners from different language backgrounds catered for during reading instruction? (Chapter two)
- What policy and procedures guide the instruction of reading in South African primary schools with special reference to language diversity and the Language in Education Policy? How can the five main components of reading, informed by the Curriculum and the Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) English Home Language, be incorporated into daily reading instruction? (Chapter three)
- What daily activities do the teacher and learners engage in that promote the reading development of beginner readers in a Grade 1 classroom in the Umlazi district, Kwazulu Natal as observed during an ethnographic study? (Chapter four and five)
- Based on the literature study and the ethnographic inquiry, what recommendations can be made to promote the reading development of beginner readers? (Chapter 6)

## **1.4 THE RESEARCH AIM**

In the light of the above research problem the principal aim of the study was to investigate how the reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of KwaZulu Natal can be promoted.

The following objectives were identified, namely

- to expound the theoretical perspectives informing reading and reading instruction and to describe effective instructional strategies for beginner readers; to indicate how the diverse needs of learners from different language backgrounds can be catered for during reading instruction;
- to discuss the policies and procedures which guide the instruction of reading in South African primary schools, with special reference to language diversity and the Language in Education Policy? To indicate how the five main components of reading are informed by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) English Home Language Policy and are incorporated into the daily reading instruction;
- to explore the daily activities engaged in by the teacher and the learners that promote the reading development of beginner readers in a Grade 1 classroom in the Umlazi district, Kwazulu Natal as observed during an ethnographic study;
- based on the literature study and the ethnographic inquiry, to make recommendations to promote the reading development of beginner readers.

## **1.5 METHOD**

The research questions were addressed by means of a literature review and an empirical inquiry. Only a synopsis of the empirical inquiry is presented in this section. The full detail is presented in Chapter 4 of this study.

### **1.5.1 Literature review**

An extensive literature study was undertaken to gain insight into the importance of reading, how teachers choose instructional methodologies for beginner readers, the international debates surrounding reading instruction and the realities of teaching beginner reading in the South African context. The importance of policies in education cannot be ignored as they inform teaching practices, so a review of these was considered necessary too. The sources include books, policy documents and legislation passed on reading or relevant to reading, newspaper and magazine articles, journal articles and internet publications.

### **1.5.2 Research design**

The research design was qualitative in nature and entailed an ethnographic case study of the teacher and Grade 1 learners engaged in the development of beginner reading in a selected primary school in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal.

This study adopted an interpretive paradigm to understand and generate knowledge on reading (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:6). The interpretive paradigm states that reality is socially constructed and that researchers seek to understand what meanings people give to that reality (Check & Schutt 2012:150).

Qualitative research can be defined as focusing on “phenomena that occur in natural settings – that is, in the real world” and “involve(s) studying those phenomena in all their complexity” (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:135). McMillan and Schumacher (2010:321) support this definition and indicate that qualitative research occurs in natural settings, is sensitive to context, involves direct data-collection from the source, involves rich narrative descriptions that allow the researcher to understand behavior, focuses on why and how the behavior occurs, involves inductive data-analysis, focuses on the participants’ understanding and meanings, has an emergent design that changes as the study progresses, and supports the notion that understandings and explanations are complex and have several perspectives.

*Ethnography* is defined as “a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system” (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:23). The researcher studies the chosen group in its natural setting over a lengthy period of time (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:139). The emphasis is

on the everyday behaviour of the group (ibid.). Furthermore, McMillan and Schumacher (2010:24) state that a case study examines “a bounded system, or case, over time in depth, employing multiple sources of data found in the setting.” Case studies enable the researcher to gain insight into cause and effect and the observation of these effects in real contexts (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007:253).

### **1.5.2.1 The research site and the selection of the participants**

A Grade 1 class located in a former Model C school which uses English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), in a suburban area in the Umlazi District of KwaZulu Natal, was selected for the study, using both convenience and purposive sampling. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:137) describe *convenience sampling* as using a group of subjects that are easily accessible, like a class at one’s university or school. In *purposive sampling* the researcher, “selects particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest” (ibid). Check and Schutt (2012:104) support this notion. For this study I selected a Grade 1 class for the first school term of 2016, during which the reading development of beginner readers is initiated by a qualified teacher in a primary school in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal. The school is referred to by the pseudonym, Blue Primary. The site provided an information-rich setting in which to explore the promotion of reading development among beginner readers. Moreover, since ethnography requires extensive fieldwork (in the case of this study, three to five hours a week, Monday to Friday), I am the resident learning support teacher at the selected school. This reduced travelling costs and was time-effective.

One of four Grade 1 teachers at the school, Miss Smith (pseudonym), was selected to participate in this study. Miss Smith has eight years’ experience as a teacher, has taught Grade 1 for the past four years at the school, and is the Grade Head for Grade 1. She holds a B.Ed. degree in Foundation Phase from the University of the Witwatersrand; she was willing to participate in this study which involved close observation of her classroom activities for an extended period; and has undergone extensive training in Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS), the reading programme used by Blue Primary to teach beginning reading. The THRASS programme is described in detail in chapter 4 (cf. 4.3.1.1). In addition, all the Grade 1 learners in Miss Smith’s class participated in the study (n=29). Nine

learners were selected for interviews together with nine sets of parents, based on their home language (3 English, 3 Afrikaans and 3 isiZulu) (cf.1.5.2.2).

In addition, the Head of Department (HOD) of the Foundation Phase, Mrs. White (pseudonym), was selected to participate in the study. She has been a teacher at Blue Primary for 40 years and an HOD since 1996 (20 years). I interviewed her at the beginning of the study to understand the role the school plays in supporting and promoting reading development in the Foundation Phase, and why the reading programme (THRASS) was selected.

### **1.5.2.2 Data-collection**

The classroom and classroom artefacts were observed and interviews were conducted as part of the fieldwork in order to collect data for the study. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:350) describe the use of observations as a good method of determining what is happening naturally in the research site. They continue by stating that observations are crucial and central in the use of ethnographic studies, and that they allow the researcher to gain insight into and an understanding of the phenomenon being studied (ibid.). I assumed the role of participant observer as I am an insider in the organization (a member of the staff of Blue Primary) who both observed, and at times assisted with classroom activities as determined by the teacher during the fieldwork (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:350). Check and Schutt (2012:188) indicate that participant observation involves developing a sustained relationship with the people while they conduct their everyday activities. The benefit of observations in a qualitative study is that they are unstructured and free-flowing, allowing for greater flexibility (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:147). Observations started during the first week of the school term 1 (January 2016) and continued for approximately 10 weeks until the end of the term (March 2016).

Informal conversation interviews and three semi-structured interviews were conducted with Miss Smith (at the beginning, the middle and the end of the study), with selected parents of the Grade 1 learners (at the end of the study) and selected Grade 1 learners (during the study and at the end of the study). A semi-structured interview was conducted with Mrs. White, the HOD of the Foundation Phase, at the beginning of the study. The semi-structured interviews

with the teacher, the HOD and the parents involved the use of a few central questions (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:148; cf. Appendices I, J & K). The interviews with the learners were in the form of informal conversations and questions that emerged from the context at any given time and were asked during the natural course of events (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:355). Leedy and Ormrod (2010:148) indicate that informal, unstructured interviews can generate information that the researcher had not intentionally planned to ask for. The interviews with the teacher and the parents were recorded on a digital recorder (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:331) with their permission. Field-notes were taken down of the interviews with the learners. The artifacts (in the form of the learners' drawings, and classroom posters and learning material) were photographed.

Miss Smith and I also kept keep journals of our daily experiences and of our thoughts or any ideas relating to the teaching of reading (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:140).

### **1.5.2.3 Data-analysis**

Leedy and Ormrod (2010:138 & 153) describe *data analysis* as a spiral. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:367-371) support this notion, and their ideas will be integrated into the spiral. The spiral includes the following ongoing processes as used during this study:

- organise the transcribed data into possible themes, concepts or categories;
- peruse the data set several times to get a sense of it in its entirety, and listen to the recordings several times;
- identify general categories or themes (the classification of the data into meaningful groups, coding of the data);
- integrate and summarise the data (synthesis – conclusions are drawn).

The transcription of the data is the process of taking the notes or relevant data and converting them into a format that will make analysis easier and more efficient (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:370). In this study I transcribed all the recorded data on an ongoing basis during fieldwork and engaged in preliminary analysis while doing so. The coding of the data was also done after the fieldwork. During this process I identified small pieces of data that stand alone. These data parts are called 'segments', which may include a word, a sentence,

several lines or pages. The segments were analysed and a code was produced for each segment. A *code* is simply a label for a segment and can be a name or phrase that provides meaning to the segment. Codes included, namely “activities, quotations, relationships, context, participant perspectives, events, processes, other actions or ideas” (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:370-371). Categories are usually formed from grouped codes (ibid); the researcher seeks meanings and establishes relationships among the categories. This is done by determining patterns in the data. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:378) describe a *pattern* as a relationship among categories. In this study I used the main components of beginner reading instruction, reading (including sight words), phonics (THRASS and alphabet knowledge), vocabulary, phonemic awareness and comprehension as the main categories, whereby I grouped the findings regarding the classroom activities (cf. 5.4).

Triangulation was also done in this study; that is, the “cross-validation among data sources, data collection strategies, time periods and theoretical schemes” (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:379). In this study I discussed the findings with the teacher, related the findings to the literature reviewed, and sought the peer scrutiny of the supervisor.

### **1.5.3 Trustworthiness of the data**

The trustworthiness of data entails the gathering of data in a manner that is accurate, carefully recorded and interpreted by the researcher (the participants have to agree with the findings), that reflects what actually happened in the field and what was said or observed during the study in the field and during the interviews. The following strategies were employed to increase the trustworthiness of the data, as proposed by McMillan and Schumacher (2010:330-332):

- multimethod data-collection strategies – extended fieldwork, observations and interviews, and an examination of the artefacts;
- participant language and verbatim accounts – interviews were conducted in the basic language (English), understandable by all the participants, and recorded verbatim;
- low inference descriptors – concrete, precise descriptions were derived from the field-notes, the self-reflective journals and the interviews, which allowed for



patterns in the data to be identified. The descriptions were almost literal in this study, and important terms came from the participants instead of the abstract language used by the researcher;

- member checking – verification by the participants. I constantly checked with the participants if I understood their meanings correctly, and allowed the teacher access to the transcribed interviews and field-notes if requested.

#### **1.5.4 Research ethics**

In this study written permission was sought and granted by:

- the Ethical Committee, College of Education, University of South Africa;
- the Kwazulu Natal Department of Education;
- the principal of the participating school;
- the participating teacher and the HOD (Foundation Phase);
- the parents of all the Grade 1 learners in the selected class;
- the Grade 1 learners in the selected class in the form of assent.

The principles of research ethics which were adhered to include the following (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:339; Leedy & Ormrod 2010:101; Check and Schutt 2012:321):

- Informed consent – An informed consent form was presented to all the adult participants which included, namely a brief description of the nature of the study, what participation would involve, a statement indicating that participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any stage without penalty, and a guarantee of anonymity. Furthermore, the researcher's contact details were made available, as well as the offer to provide detailed information about the study once concluded, to the participants (cf. Appendices D, E, F & G).
- An assent form was given to the parents for discussion with all the Grade 1 learners, and was signed (cf. Appendix H).
- Privacy – The selected school was referred to as 'Blue Primary'. The chosen teacher was referred to by the pseudonym of Miss Smith; the HOD of the Foundation Phase was referred to by the pseudonym of Mrs. White; all the learners

and the parents were referred to by pseudonyms and all identifying details were removed.

- Honesty – The findings of the research were reported with integrity and honesty, not adding or removing data to fabricate a conclusion. Full acknowledgement of any ideas, material or words belonging to others was provided.
- Storage and dissemination of the data - The data were stored on a password locked computer in a secure home office. After the successful examination of the dissertation, a meeting would be held with the principal of Blue Primary, the teacher and interested parents to discuss the findings, and an abstract would be made available to the school. The participating Grade 1 class would be informed of the findings in an appropriate way.

## **1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

*Literacy* is a broad term that includes several aspects, reading being one of them. This study will focus primarily on beginner reading. This study is limited to one primary school in a suburban area which is well-managed and well-resourced. This is, however, not the reality of all the schools in the Umlazi District of KwaZulu Natal or in the rest of South Africa. .

## **1.7 CLARIFICATION OF THE CONCEPTS**

The following terms have been identified as important to the understanding of the study. They are described briefly here as more in-depth descriptions of the concepts will be given in subsequent chapters.

- Beginner readers: These are learners who are in the early stages of literacy development. “In early literacy, students surrounded by reading and writing gradually develop the foundation for these activities” and “Areas of knowledge needed for early literacy include listening comprehension, print knowledge, environmental print, alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, phonological short-term memory, rapid naming, visual memory and visual perceptual skills” (Jennings et al. 2010:186-187).

- English Second Language Learners (ESL): This includes learners who are not learning in their home language but rather in a language that is a second or even third language (Nel 2005:151).
- LoLT: This is the acronym used in South Africa and refers to the “language medium in which learning and teaching, including assessment, takes place” (DBE 2010:3).

## **1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION**

Chapter 1: Background to the study – This chapter serves to briefly orientate the reader to the need for the study, the relevant research to support the study and an overview of the research problem, the aims and the methodology to be used.

Chapter 2: A review of the related literature – Chapter 2 involves a study of the theoretical frameworks which inform reading and beginner reading instruction. It gives insight into the debates surrounding effective instructional practices for reading and the needs of diverse beginner readers.

Chapter 3: A review of related literature in South Africa – Chapter 3 involves an investigation of reading instruction within the context of South Africa. It explores the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) English Home Language, as well as the Language in Education Policy.

Chapter 4: The research design and methodology – In this chapter the researcher discusses the methodology used, qualitative research practices and the research design.

Chapter 5: The findings - This chapter presents the daily teaching and learning practices of the teacher and the learners that promote the reading development of beginner readers in a selected classroom in the Umlazi district of Kwazulu Natal.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations – This chapter culminates in a summary of the findings, and provides recommendations for further research.

## **1.9 SUMMARY**

The poor reading level of many South African learners is a major cause for concern. Without the ability to read well learners are at a huge disadvantage and are unable to access the information needed to progress academically. The reading crisis in South Africa has resulted in the DBE taking action in the form of various programmes and projects to improve reading. Despite their best efforts the level of reading still remains poor. The teachers are at the forefront of the reading crisis and need to be adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to promote the development of reading. An in-depth study is needed to determine the best practices for teaching reading in Grade 1 as this lays the foundation for further reading development.

In the next chapter I will thoroughly review the theoretical perspectives on reading and reading instruction and the debates surrounding them.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON READING AND READING INSTRUCTION**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

As indicated in chapter one (cf.1.1), learning to read is a fundamental part of a learner's educational journey. It is one of the greatest accomplishments in childhood because it forms the foundation for learning and academic achievement (Paris 2005:184). The joy and pleasure reading brings to many learners as they discover facts about topics of interest or as they stimulate their imagination while exploring 'alternative worlds' is certainly significant (Harrison 2004:23). The ability to read in the workplace is also of vital importance, even more so in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where reading is a tool of communication in a culture dominated by print (Goetze, Sanders & Bailey 2010:729). Jennings et al. (2010:5) postulate that when a population has a large number of young adults who lack reading skills it threatens to divide society into the following two groups, namely the highly literate and the low income, low achieving class who is poorly equipped for educational or professional advancement.

Considering the indisputable importance of being able to read, the researcher will first of all present a review of the methods used in reading instruction. Two main methods are used worldwide for reading instruction, namely the Whole Language Approach and the Phonics Approach. The differences between these two methods will be discussed, and a historical overview will be presented of the debates surrounding the two methods.

An understanding of reading methods is one aspect of a teacher's knowledge; another important component is reading instruction. As mentioned in chapter 1, the teacher's knowledge of reading instruction is a crucial factor in promoting reading development (Lyon & Weiser 2009:475). Reading instruction of a high quality (especially for beginner readers in Grade 1) has a positive impact on reading achievement and results in fewer learners struggling at the end of a year (Allington & Baker 2007:84).

A review of what constitutes effective reading instruction will be undertaken.

Worldwide classes are becoming more diverse with learners who come from different cultures and who speak different languages (McLachlan, Nicholson, Fielding-Barnsley,

Mercer & Ohi 2013:83). Reading instruction has to accommodate learners from different language backgrounds.

A review of the literature on how this is being achieved in the classrooms will be conducted. In this chapter the focus will be on international literature, primarily the United States of America. Chapter 3 will include an overview of the literature within the South African context.

## **2.2 READING METHODS – A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

Throughout the past century a debate has raged as to which method is best to teach reading, the whole language approach or the phonics approach. The debate has been referred to in the media as the “reading wars” (Shanahan 2006:1). Several countries have been engaged in this debate, and include New Zealand, Australia, England and the United States of America (Duncan 2006:39; McLachlan et al. 2013:26).

Although most proponents of both the whole language approach and the phonics approach have since come to acknowledge the contribution of each to reading, a review of these two methods, as well as the debate surrounding them, is necessary (Snow & Juel 2005:518).

### **2.2.1 Understanding the Whole Language Approach**

The Whole Language movement views reading and reading development through the lens of constructivism and has its roots in psycholinguistics (Tracey & Morrow 2012:59). Psycholinguistics (an interest in the way people learn and use language) was a relatively new scientific discipline in the 60s. It was invented primarily by George Miller (a psychologist) and Noam Chomsky, a linguist (Smith & Goodman 2008:61). Tracey and Morrow (2012:70) explain that the Whole Language theory is a philosophy about how children learn, and teachers use this knowledge to inform their instructional practices. This philosophy “encompasses and extends” the psycholinguistics theory (ibid.). The terms ‘whole language theory’, ‘whole language philosophy’ and ‘whole language approach’ will be used interchangeably in this study.

Early pioneers of the Whole Language Approach included Frank Smith, and Kenneth and Yetta Goodman. Smith and Goodman assume that reading is mainly a language process, a process that develops naturally, like speaking. They believe that the value of psycholinguistics is in the possible insight it can provide in the “process of reading and the process of learning how to read” (Smith & Goodman 2008:62). Goodman and Smith’s writings laid the foundation for the Whole Language theory which heavily influenced reading instruction from the 1980s (Tracey & Morrow 2012:70).

Goodman and Smith (Snow & Juel 2005:506-507) believe that readers use multiple cueing systems, and that both novice and expert readers process text similarly. Teachers were trained to do “miscue” analysis, which meant that reading errors were classified based on syntactic (sentence level), semantic (vocabulary and meaning), and visual/graphic-based causes (Snow & Juel 2005:506-507). Learners were encouraged to make the best choice (or guess) when reading, based on meaning. This meant a learner who substituted the word “big” for “large” displayed a semantic-based miscue and was showing understanding (Snow & Juel 2005:507). Goodman (1997:596) refers to this as a “psycholinguistic guessing game”. He believes that miscues provide great insight into a learner’s reading strengths and weaknesses as the miscues are the result of the reading process having gone awry on a large or small scale (Goodman 1969:12). Advocates of the whole language philosophy believe that meaning does not exist in the text but is rather created as the reader and author interact through the text (Bird 2011:135).

Proponents of the Whole Language Approach emphasize the importance of the learners being actively involved in their learning. Due to the constructivist notions of the Whole Language Approach learners are encouraged to build an understanding through experiences. The learners are also encouraged to foster a positive attitude toward reading (Provenzo & Provenzo 2008: 581-582).

Supporters of the whole language philosophy believe that language should not be broken up into basic letters or a combination of letters to decode words. Instead, they believe that language is a “complete system of making meaning, with words functioned in relation to each other in context” (Huang 2014:71). Phonics is not ignored, but it is not taught in isolation or in sequence as a set of skills but rather kept in the perspective of real reading and writing. The ultimate goal for the reader is to seek meaning, not isolated sounds or words. Reading is

founded on authentic, meaningful and relevant experiences. The whole language proponents believe that phonics programmes are primarily unscientific and that the letter/sound relationships are unpredictable and do not produce meaningful language. Learners are rather encouraged to discover the alphabetic principle (the letters in the alphabet are used to represent sounds) when they learn to write, resulting in invented spelling first, and then they move towards conventional spelling (Goodman 1986:37-39).

In a whole language classroom the learners are encouraged to work collaboratively, to respect one another and to engage actively in the learning process. The teacher is seen as a “co-learner” who is sensitive to the needs, culture and communities of her learners. The teachers plan experiences in order for the learners to be able to read and write in a wide range of genres in response to authentic and functional experiences. The relationship between teaching and learning is of great importance in a whole language classroom (Goodman 1989:114, 122).

#### **2.2.1.1 Theorists who influenced the proponents of the Whole Language Approach**

The whole language movement was influenced by the theorists John Dewey (1859-1952), Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) (Goodman 1989:116).

John Dewey believed that the learners should be at the center of the process of curriculum development. Language should be integrated with all the other studies in the curriculum and the classroom would thus be a place where learners actively construct, inquire and create. Learning, including reading and writing, was accordingly based on real life experiences (Goodman 1989:116; Tracey & Morrow 2012:60).

Piaget (1952) (Woolfolk 2010: 31-32) carefully observed children, including his own, and discovered that they develop their conceptual worlds, which differ from those of adults, through their activity with external objects. He believed that the developing logic of a child was not inferior to that of an adult, but rather unique and different (Bird 2011:137). Piaget explored how children are actively involved in understanding their worlds and how they try to solve problems and answer questions within their worlds (Tracey & Morrow 2012:91).



Lev Vygotsky believed that children learn through their social interaction with others, especially while engaging with more knowledgeable members of the society. He believed that with the help of adults or more capable peers in the form of prompting, clues, reminders, encouragement and structure (to name a few) a child is more capable of solving problems. Vygotsky named this the ‘zone of proximal development’, the point at which a child can master a task if given sufficient (and useful) help and support (Woolfolk 2010:47).

It is evident how the aforementioned theorists influenced the advocates of the Whole Language Theory. The shared belief of using authentic, real life experiences and meaningful texts, the participation of children who are actively involved in constructing meaning while learning and the importance of social interactions with others who work collaboratively, helping one another to solve problems and facilitate learning, are all integral aspects of the Whole Language Theory (Goodman 1986:26-31).

## **2.2.2 Understanding the phonics approach**

The *phonics* of a written language has been defined as the letters and spelling patterns of a language’s alphabet and the speech sounds they represent. The more recent use of the term is understood as a method of reading instruction (Balmuth 1982:3). Different written languages have different phonics systems; so this makes it possible for the “soft g” to be pronounced as “page” in English but as “rouge” in French, although the same letter is used (Balmuth 1982:3).

Different languages have different symbol systems, called orthographies, for representing speech or the spoken form. Most Western European languages use an alphabetic system whereas languages like Chinese do not (Goswami 2007:124).

The first alphabet was introduced in approximately 1500 B.C. and has undergone several transformations to achieve the current alphabet. The word *alphabet* is defined as the characters in a writing system which all represent specific phonemes (speech sounds) (Balmuth 1982:15, 29). A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound, and changes in these units change the meaning of words, e.g., /c/a/t/ or /c/o/t/ and /c/a/n/ or /c/a/n/e/. Phonemic awareness is a type of phonological awareness, which is the ability to analyse and manipulate the phonemes in spoken words (Scanlon, Anderson & Sweeney 2010:77)

Different letter combinations (spellings) can represent the same phoneme, e.g., /e/ he; /ea/ heat; /ee/ feet; /y/ happy. However, the same letter (or letter combinations) can represent different phonemes, e.g., /a/ can be pronounced as at least six different phonemes (speech sounds) lady, tap, call, was, zebra, drama; /ea/ thread, meat (bear in mind, however, that some pronunciations do change according to dialect or accent) (Balmuth 1982:15, 29). An interesting characteristic of the alphabetic system is that after the symbols of any given language are understood independent reading will be possible (Balmuth 1982:31).

*Phonics* is a method of reading instruction that makes a child aware of the connections between the sounds (phonemes) of the spoken words and the letters (graphemes) that represent the sounds in the written form (Scanlon et al. 2010:77). Caldwell and Leslie (2013:70) concur and indicate that phonics instruction is a method of teaching reading that fosters an understanding that there are “predictable relationships” between the phonemes (speech sounds) and the graphemes (the written letters of the alphabet that represent the sounds). Chall (1983:104) succinctly defines *phonics* as “knowledge of letter-sound correspondences.” An understanding that letters can represent sounds is central to decoding words (Stahl, Duffy-Hester & Dougherty-Stahl 2006:128). Some researchers believe that knowledge of phonics is critical as it provides the individual with the strategy of sounding out letters (and combinations) that will equip him or her with the ability to read unfamiliar words (Shaywitz & Shaywitz 2006:16).

Good phonics instruction should develop the alphabetic principle and phonological awareness. The *alphabetic principle* can be defined in its simplest form as the understanding that letters in words may stand for specific sounds (Stahl et al. 2006:128-129). Learners use their awareness of the alphabetic principle to sound out words by associating the graphemes (letters) with the phonemes (sounds). This process of matching can only be achieved if the words are accurately broken down into their phonemes (Gillet, Temple, Temple & Crawford 2012:54).

When a beginner reader encounters an unfamiliar one-syllable (monosyllabic) word, he or she is encouraged to identify and separate the letters and to blend the individual phonemes (sounds) to decode the word (Shanker & Cockrum 2009:55).

*Phonological awareness* includes rhyme and syllable awareness, onset-rime awareness and phoneme awareness (Walpole & McKenna 2007:33). It can also be described as consciously being aware of and focusing on the phonemes (sounds) of a language, and includes being able to manipulate these phonemes (Gillet et al. 2012:54-55).

Grapheme/phoneme (letter/sound) correspondences are taught in sequence when implementing systematic phonics instruction. Learners are taught consonants, vowels, digraphs, blends and diphthongs in a specific sequence, depending on the phonics programme selected. As the learner's understanding progresses, more difficult and complex elements of phonics are introduced, such as syllables and affixes (De Graaff, Bosman, Hasselman & Verhoeven 2009:319). The term 'phonics' incorporates several approaches of phonics instruction. The Report of the National Reading Panel in the United States of America (NRP 2000) lists five types of phonics instruction and describes them as follows:

- Analogy phonics: Teaching students unfamiliar words by analogy to known words (recognizing that the rime segment of an unfamiliar word is identical to that of a familiar word, and then blending the known rime with the new word onset, such as reading 'brick' by recognizing that -ick is contained in the known word 'kick', or reading 'stump' in analogy to 'jump'.
- Analytic phonics: Teaching students to analyse letter-sound relations in previously learned words to avoid pronouncing sounds in isolation.
- Embedded phonics: Teaching students skills by embedding phonics instruction in text reading, a more implicit approach that relies to some extent on incidental learning.
- Phonics through spelling: Teaching students to segment words into phonemes and to select letters for those phonemes (i.e., teaching students to spell words phonetically).
- Synthetic phonics: Teaching students explicitly to convert letters into sounds (phonemes) and then blend the sounds to form recognizable words."

The two main approaches to teaching phonics are explicit and implicit, which are commonly known as synthetic and analytic phonics (Gunning 2014:232). As these two approaches are mainly used to teach phonics they will be discussed in more detail.

### **2.2.2.1 Synthetic phonics**

Synthetic phonics promotes an understanding that there are 44 phonemes (sounds) in the English language and that these sounds are represented by graphemes (letters). Sometimes the grapheme stands alone to produce one sound (d in dog), and sometimes two, three or four graphemes stand together to form one sound, e.g., ch in chair, dge in edge, eigh in eight (Dooner 2011:10). Synthetic phonics allows the learners to master the phonic code systematically from simple to complex (Dooner 2012:31). Proponents of synthetic phonics recognize the limitations of an over-reliance on visual memory; therefore learners are taught few words ‘by sight’. Instead, learners are encouraged to blend and segment words in order to decode them in the early stages of reading (Dooner 2012:32).

Synthetic phonics has garnered the support of numerous researchers throughout the world. In the last decade governments in the United States of America, Britain and Australia have all commissioned inquiries or reviews to determine the best possible way to implement literacy programmes in early childhood education. The findings of these inquiries have produced similar results, namely that the early stages of teaching reading (and spelling) must include synthetic phonics (called systematic or explicit phonics in Australia) (Dooner 2011:10).

### **2.2.2.2 Synthetic phonics in Australia and Britain**

In Australia an important inquiry into the teaching of literacy was made by Ken Rowe in 2005, who released a report called, “Teaching Reading: A National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy” (Nayton 2013:18). Rowe concluded in his findings that systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction was necessary in order for children to master the alphabetic code-breaking skills required for early reading. He went on to claim that when foundational phonics skills are taught early, the need for expensive intervention programmes was reduced (Rowe 2006:3). In 2006 the Western Australian Department of Education and Training’s Literacy and Numeracy Review supported the findings that phonics (and phonological awareness) should be taught systematically and explicitly. This was followed by a report in 2008 called, ‘Teaching for Growth: Effective Teaching of Literacy and Numeracy’ which also supported the explicit and direct instruction of phonics (and phonological awareness) (Louden, Rohl & Hopkins 2008, in Nayton 2013:18). Fay (2011:6) agrees that phonics is an important and vital aspect in reading instruction. She asserts that children respond well to

and improve the level of their reading through direct phonics instruction, among others (Fay 2011:6). She mentions her dismay at the support that whole language has received over the past 20 years, despite the claims made by numerous researchers who support direct phonics instruction. Fay also believes that the inclusion of phonics in the national curriculum by the Minister of Education (Julia Gillard) in 2009 was encouraging. However, the implementation of phonics instruction needed impetus as many teachers were still using methods that had their roots in the whole language methodology (Fay 2011:6, 9).

Jim Rose released his final report on the teaching of reading in England in 2006. He contends that from 1989-1998, despite phonics being an integral part of the reading instruction curriculum, phonics was not being taught as was mandated (Rose 2006:3). In 1998 the National Literacy Strategy changed this by introducing a structured programme that included phonic content to be taught and how it should be taught. Rose emphasized the importance of systematic phonics instruction as crucial for promoting reading. He asserted that synthetic phonics is the best approach to reading instruction and it enables most learners, “the best route to becoming skilled readers” (Rose 2006:18-19). The National Curriculum in England (2013:15) supports this notion and mentions the importance of using phonics to teach beginning reading.

### **2.2.2.3 Analytic phonics**

Stahl et al. (2006:136) describe *analytic phonics* as starting from a word, preferably a word that the child already knows, and breaking it down into its parts. The learners are then shown a series of words that all have the same sound, e.g., bed/pen/rest. Some researchers postulate the linguistic method (based on the theories of Leonard Bloomfield) of phonics instruction as also being analytic. Bloomfield believed that many consonant sounds cannot be produced accurately in isolation, e.g., /cat/ the first sound is not /kuh/ but the unpronounceable /k/. He believed that learners should use word families and this would help them to pronounce unknown words from known patterns, e.g., /cat/fat/rat/ (Stahl et al. 2006:136). By using analytic phonics the learners are taught that some words share sound segments. The learners are shown letter combinations in sets of words that share common beginning or ending letter sequences with the same pronunciation. This implies that although the learners are aware of individual sounds in words, they do not pronounce them in isolation (De Graaff et al. 2009:318; Gunning 2014:233).

## **2.3 THE DEBATE SURROUNDING WHOLE LANGUAGE AND PHONICS**

The debate surrounding which method is better to teach reading is not new and has been raging for many years in several countries throughout the world, including the United States of America, England and Australia, as mentioned above. However, the focus in this discussion will be on the United States of America.

The whole language theorists believe that learning to read is as natural as learning to speak. However, researchers opposed to this believe that learning to read is not a natural process and that humans do not have a predisposition to learn to read as they have for acquiring speech (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui & Tarver 2010:5). Carnine et al. (2010:5) claim that all people learn how to speak their mother tongue without formal instruction but argue that without formal or specific instruction in reading, many people fail to learn to read.

At the core of the debate is whether or not a code-emphasis (phonics) or a meaning-emphasis (whole language) approach is better for reading instruction, with proponents from both sides trying to validate their beliefs (Carnine et al. 2010:40). Supporters of the code-emphasis believe that children learn to read by understanding the letter/sound correspondence, from the smallest parts to the whole. Advocates of the meaning-emphasis believe that children learn to read from the whole word using context clues, pictures, word configurations and initial letters to decode words (Carnine et al. 2010:41).

A discussion of how these two approaches shaped reading instruction in the United States of America will give greater insight into the debate, starting with the whole language approach. William S. Gray (Balmuth 1982:197-198), Dean of the School of Education at the University of Chicago from 1918-1931, played a significant role in promoting the Whole Language Approach to reading instruction in the United States during the twentieth century. He authored the Curriculum Foundation Series with Dick and Jane (for the Scott-Foresman Publishing Company). Gray (ibid) explicitly listed instructions for the prescribed whole word programme in the teachers' guidebooks. Gray's beliefs and approach were followed by almost all of the authors of the most commonly-used commercially published reading programmes into the second quarter of the twentieth century (Balmuth 1982:197-198).

Although Kenneth Goodman authored a beginning reading programme, called 'Reading Systems' (Scott-Foresman Publishing, 1971) and is a strong advocate of the Whole Language Approach, he differs from Gray in respect of his opinion about skills. Goodman (and also Frank Smith) does not support the practice of breaking reading down into the skills of word-analysis or of comprehension, whereas Gray had explicit instructions laid out for teaching specific skills (Balmuth 1982:200-201). Despite these differences in the supporters of the Whole Language Approach, it gained in popularity and was used widely in the United States.

The Whole Language Approach to reading instruction was challenged by Rudolph Flesch (1955) who authored the book entitled, 'Why Johnny Can't Read'. Flesch challenged the views on reading instruction which, at the time, advocated the use of sight words. He vehemently supported the use of the Phonics Approach in reading instruction. Flesch was so passionate about the use of phonics that he claimed it was the only method to use in beginning reading instruction (Chall 1983:3).

The debate reached its peak in the late 1960s in the United States and resulted in the National Conference on Research in English engaging in a three-day meeting on research in reading at Syracuse University (Chall 1983:4). The committee agreed that beginning reading required more specific and focused attention from researchers. One of the outcomes of this meeting was a large-scale study on reading led by Jeanne Chall, from 1962-1965. The longitudinal study included a review of 22 beginning reading programmes, interviews with 25 proponents from both reading instruction methods, a study of a basal-reading series available at the time, and discussions with classroom teachers, parents and administrators. The study sought to answer several questions on beginner reading instruction through a well-designed research project. The questions Chall wanted to investigate and find answers to included "whether some approaches were indeed more effective than others for specific outcomes in reading, for particular kinds of children, with particular kinds of teachers, and in particular kinds of school situations" (Chall 1983:5).

In the introduction to the updated edition of Chall's original research (1983:42-44) she reiterates her initial findings and concurs, among others, that:

- a code-emphasis beginning reading programme produces better results than meaning-emphasis programmes;

- direct phonics instruction appears more beneficial than indirect-phonics;
- an early knowledge of the letters of the alphabet is valuable for children.

Goodman did not agree with the emphasis on phonics instruction and he rejected Chall's idea of separating 'code-breaking' from reading for meaning. He opposed the theory that language was merely a set of symbols and supported the belief that oral language was no less a code than written language (Goodman 1969:16). He maintained that teachers should always view words, phrases and sentences within the context of the whole (Goodman 1986:28).

Goodman refuted the advocates of phonics by stating that phonics reduces reading (and writing) to merely matching letters with sounds. He believed that phonics programmes did not accurately match letters to sounds, and that this relationship is often flawed, e.g., /ea/ can say /ea/ for /bread/ and /ea/ for /meat/. He rather advocated that the alphabetic principle be discovered by children through writing (Goodman 1986:37). Goodman also strongly believed in his miscue analysis theory and stated that readers demonstrate great insight into "where the text is going, what the syntactic structures will be, where new information will be introduced and where old information will be presupposed or referenced" through their miscues (Goodman 1987:57). The Whole Language Approach to reading instruction was used prolifically from the early 1970s (Blaunstein & Lyon 2006:5).

In 1973 Dr. Robert Dykstra, professor of Education at the University of Minnesota, reviewed research on reading instruction. He supported Chall's findings, which included the belief that early systematic phonics instruction was beneficial for children in learning to read (Flesch 1981:30, 45).

In 1977 a panel headed by former Secretary of Labour, Willard Wirtz, issued a report on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) which had steadily declined since 1963. Despite their concern, the panel failed to pinpoint one particular cause for the decline in these SAT scores. However, in an appendix to the report, Jeanne Chall indicated that the whole word approach to reading instruction which used "look-and-say" readers, had contributed to the low SAT scores (Flesch 1981:2).



In 1983 a panel of experts (including Jeanne Chall) came together to review the available research on reading. This resulted in their report entitled, 'Becoming a Nation of Readers'. The panel stated that phonics instruction was important in beginning reading, and helped children to identify words (Shannon 2007:65-66). The report, prepared by Anderson, Hiebert, Scott and Wilkinson (1984) maintained that the debate was no longer about whether phonics should be used for reading instruction, but rather how it should be incorporated and used in the classroom. Anderson et al. (1984:46-53) indicated that the goal of phonics instruction was to show children that there are systematic relationships between letters and sounds (the alphabetic principle). The report recommended that phonics instruction be kept simple and be completed by the end of Grade 2 for most learners. The report also recommended that learners should be given ample opportunity to read independently, to write often and to spend less time completing workbooks and skill-sheets (Anderson et al. 1984:124-125).

However, not everyone agreed with the importance placed on phonics instruction. Chall's extensive research and reviews on reading instruction (published in her book entitled, 'Learning to Read: The Great Debate, 1967' and the updated edition published in 1983) came under scrutiny by Marie Carbo in the late 1980's. Carbo and Chall were embroiled in a bitter battle of words that saw both of them vehemently defending their beliefs about reading instruction. Chall (1989:525-532) supported the findings of her research, as mentioned above, and reiterated that a code-emphasis for beginning reading instruction was important and that direct instruction in phonics improves reading achievement. She maintained that phonics needed to be taught by knowledgeable teachers who should not overdo phonics instruction or rely on workbooks where the learners practice skills independently. Chall (1989:531-532) concluded that Carbo's attempts to discredit phonics had failed.

Carbo (1989:155-156) argued that much of Chall's research supporting the use of phonics instruction was due to her own biases in favour of phonics. Carbo went on to claim that Chall was selective when reviewing the data, and purposefully chose to report on the data that supported the call for phonics instruction.

The intense public exchange of opinions by Carbo and Chall did not help to solve the 'reading wars', and research on reading instruction continued. Following the report of 'Becoming a Nation of Readers' was a book entitled 'Beginning to Read: Thinking and

Learning About Print' by Marilyn Adams in 1990. The late senator Ed Zorinsky wanted a list of phonics programmes that could be used by the Department of Education to direct schools as to the best approach with phonics instruction (Shannon 2007:66-67). Adams had the unenviable task of determining if phonics instruction was indeed valuable for beginning reading instruction and if so, how best to implement phonics instruction in schools (Adams 1991:371). Adams concluded her findings by supporting the use of phonics instruction in beginning reading, but she also advocated an end to the heated debate that surrounded reading instruction. She argued that both sides of the debate were valid and that reading instruction should complement and encompass both code-breaking and meaning (Adams 1991:371).

Adam's findings received mixed reactions from researchers. They were summarized in a critique by Allington, Chaney, Goodman, Kapinus, McGee, Richgels, Schwartz, Shannon, Smitten and Williams (in Adams 1991:370-395) as follows:

Allington supported Adam's findings of phonics being integrated into real reading and writing activities; Kapinus believed that Adams' review of reading enabled people to broaden their understanding of reading and reading instruction; McGee and Richgels acknowledged that Adams exposed the limitations of typical phonics instruction but still advocates phonics as beneficial in reading instruction; Schwartz declared Adams' research as meaningful and concurred with Adams that all stakeholders need to reach a consensus on what is important in reading instruction instead of arguing over which method is better; Williams claimed that Adams' book is balanced and sensible and that the call for phonics instruction is credible.

Chaney expressed concern over the possible misinterpretation of the findings leading to an overemphasis of the drill and practice of isolated skills, while ignoring independent reading and writing exercises. Y. Goodman claimed that Adams neglected miscue analysis research and that reading had been reduced to its most abstract units of analysis. Y. Goodman also maintained that phonics instruction (as advocated by Adams) does not help to improve the lives or status of those marginalized by society. Y. Goodman believed that Adams did not convincingly prove the relationship between reading words and comprehension, and she failed to give adequate support on how to implement phonics instruction. Shannon and Smitten (in Adams 1991:370-395) argued that the federal government of the United States of

America (who tended to advocate phonics) funded the research and that phonics was naturally favoured because of this.

Despite the support of phonics, many schools in the United States continued to use the Whole Language Approach to reading instruction (Blaunstein & Lyon 2006:5). This was evident in 1990, particularly in the state of California (Joseph 2006:70). Schools in California had decided to embrace the whole language philosophy, resulting in radical reform in reading instruction. However, whole language came under scrutiny in 1994 when the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released their test scores that indicated that the learners in California were underperforming and were at the bottom of the pile in the national reading tests (Joseph 2006:70). The policy-makers in California were in an unpleasant situation and were obliged to address the reasons for the dismal reading scores, which some believed were due to whole language being used for reading instruction (Joseph 2006:70-71).

K. Goodman contested the dismal reading performance of Californian children by arguing that California consisted of many minority groups and a high number of immigrants. He vehemently believed that whole language was being used as a scapegoat. However, although there were many minority groups, the data revealed that the scores had also dropped among those learners whose parents were educated and who had graduated from college (Palmaffy 1997:33-34).

In 1998 a report was commissioned by the United States Department of Education to address the situation of those children who were at risk of experiencing reading problems. The report entitled 'Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children' was the result of this inquiry. The panel stated that their recommendations were relevant to all learners, not only to those who struggled with reading (Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998:32). The panel's recommendations included that first Grade reading instruction should include explicit instruction and practice with sound structures that lead to phonemic awareness, and that the learners should be encouraged to read independently and recognize high frequency words on sight (Snow et al. 1998:322).

Frank Smith (1999:150-155) voiced his opposition to the call for systematic phonics and phonemic awareness instruction in the late 1990's. He argued that phonics was neither good nor bad, but his objection was against the call for the systematic delivery of phonics

instruction. He believed that the letter/sound correspondences were unpredictable, impractical and confusing to children. Smith (1999:151) continued, “Reading is not decoding to sound. The whole purpose of reading is to make sense of written language and sense is made of written language directly, not by converting it to sound”. He alleged that the idea of a learner lacking phonemic awareness was merely a scapegoat used to explain the frequent failures of phonics instruction. Smith concluded by stating that whole language was a philosophy that empowered the teachers to help the learners to learn to read under the right conditions.

In an article entitled, ‘Whole language works: Sixty years of research’, Daniels, Zemelman and Bizar (1999:32-36) claim that there is overwhelming evidence that the Whole Language Approach is a highly effective and superior method of reading instruction. They maintain that the whole language method is both progressive and holistic, that it works, and should be implemented in classrooms unashamedly.

Before the ‘Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children’ report was published, Congress had already commissioned the Head of the National Institute for Child Health and Development (NICHD) and the Secretary of Education to assemble a National Reading Panel (NRP). The Panel was to thoroughly review research on reading instruction in order to offer recommendations to effectively direct classroom instruction (Shannon 2007:68).

Of particular relevance was the NRP’s (2000:90) research on phonics instruction. The Panel’s questions included:

- Does systematic phonics instruction help children to learn to read more effectively than non-systematic phonics instruction or instruction teaching no phonics?
- Does phonics instruction improve the children’s ability to read and comprehend text, as well as their decoding and word-reading skills?
- Is phonics instruction effective with children at different socioeconomic (SES) levels?

The NRP acknowledged the approach of reading instruction used by the advocates of the whole language method and included non-phonics programmes for reading instruction in their control groups. The Panel’s (NRP 2000:90-95) findings included:

- Systematic phonics instruction does make a significant contribution to the learners' growth in reading in comparison to alternative programmes providing unsystematic or no phonics instruction.
- Systematic phonics instruction improves the reading comprehension of younger and reading disabled learners, dispelling the belief that systematic phonics instruction interferes with a learner's ability to read and comprehend text.
- Systematic phonics instruction is beneficial to all learners, regardless of their SES.

The Panel cautioned misinterpretations of these findings and stated that although systematic phonics instruction is beneficial for beginning reading instruction, the teachers must avoid an overemphasis of phonics. The Panel suggested that teachers must be taught how to implement phonics as part of their reading programme, but phonics must not be the focus of the reading programme. Phonics instruction should form part of a balanced reading programme (NRP 2000: 96-97).

The NRP's findings were not supported by all. Yatvin (NRP 2000:1) indicated her concerns in the Minority Report at the end of the NRP's report. She believed that the Panel's findings were one-sided, advocated one method of reading instruction over the other and failed to include the opinions of those who implement the policies and the programmes, namely the teachers.

Ehri (2003) presented her findings in respect of the NRP at a seminar in London in March 2003. She claimed that although systematic phonics instruction was an important aspect of reading instruction, if not delivered by a knowledgeable teacher, the likelihood of success was reduced. Ehri supported the notion that phonics instruction was part of a reading programme and needed to be combined with other forms of instruction to produce the best and most effective reading programme. She supported the Panel's findings to include fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies in reading instruction.

Pressley (2001:3-4) argued that the Panel ignored several important aspects contributing to reading instruction and were too narrow in their focus. He maintained that whole language does serve a purpose, albeit general, in promoting beginning understandings about reading and writing. He suggested that reading instruction should incorporate experiences associated

with whole language and should not be limited to instruction in skills (2001:29). He declared that the most effective classroom instruction has balance where skills are taught explicitly and the learners are encouraged to read whole texts and engage in real writing (Pressley 2001:25).

### **2.3.1 Summary**

After many reports, inquiries and debates about reading instruction, it is certainly evident that learning to read is a complex process. Although ardent supporters of both phonics and the whole language philosophy may never reach consensus, the call from many researchers was to stop arguing about which method is superior, and instead to focus on delivering high quality reading instruction that caters for the diverse needs of all learners (Duke & Block 2012:66-67). By the late 1990s most researchers were able to reach consensus on which aspects of reading instruction are important. The intense debate of the 1960s had eased and reading instruction was no longer narrowly defined as either skills-based (phonics) or meaning-based (whole language), but rather included aspects from both (Kim 2008:373). A ‘balanced’ approach to teaching reading emerged and has been supported by many researchers who include the five big ideas or the ‘fab five of reading’ in their daily reading programmes (Dooner 2012:31). The National Reading Panel (NRP 2000) supports this and lists the important elements of reading instruction as including:

- phonemic awareness;
- phonics instruction;
- vocabulary instruction;
- reading fluency;
- reading comprehension.

The NRP report resulted in major reading reforms with the legislation of the ‘No Child Left Behind’ (NCLB) Act of 2001 being promulgated. Bush (2004:114) stated that the NCLB Act was part of his belief that “every child can learn.” Flowing from the NCLB Act was a reading programme called ‘Reading First’. ‘Reading First’ had as its goal to ensure that all learners were reading at grade level by the end of Grade 3 (Baker, Smolkowski, Mercier-Smith, Fien, Kame’enui & Thomas-Beck 2011: 307).

Reflecting on the academic debates surrounding reading instruction and the reform resulting from them, one would assume that the ‘reading wars’ had finally ended. However, Allington (2006:3) suggests that the debate on reading has merely moved from academic circles to the political arena. This requires a separate review, which is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

## **2.4 EFFECTIVE READING INSTRUCTION FOR BEGINNER READERS**

As discussed previously, reading instruction is a complex task. The reading reform brought about by the NRP’s report in 2000 meant that most schools in the United States began teaching reading according to the five main components listed by them (Rupley, Blair & Nichols 2009:125-126). These components are briefly described as:

- Phonemic awareness: The ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes (sounds) in spoken words.
- Phonics instruction: This is a method of teaching reading that focuses on the relationship of letter/sound correspondences and their use to read and spell words. Phonics instruction is designed particularly for beginning reading instruction and helps learners who have difficulty in learning to read.
- Fluency: This is the ability to read text with speed, accuracy and correct expression.
- Comprehension: This is integral to reading, which is, namely to understand and gain meaning from any text.
- Vocabulary: Vocabulary knowledge is related to comprehension. Learners need to understand what words mean in order to understand what they are reading. Vocabulary instruction includes vocabulary taught in the content (subjects taught at school) areas.

Considering the importance of these elements of reading instruction, a review on how to teach each one effectively is necessary.

## **2.4.1 Teaching beginning reading**

### **2.4.1.1 Direct, explicit and systematic instruction**

The call by the NRP (2000) throughout their report was for direct (including explicit) and systematic instruction. Archer and Hughes (2011:1) define *explicit instruction* as a structured, systematic, direct and unambiguous approach to teaching. Carnine et al. (2010:13) declare that instruction is explicit if the teacher "...clearly models or demonstrates (and, if needed, explains) what she wants students to learn." Gunning (2014:232) explains the term 'explicit', in the sense of phonics instruction, to mean synthetic phonics instruction.

Rupley et al. (2009:127-128) explain that reading instruction is explicit when it includes clear explanations, modeling (or demonstrating) and guided practice. Modeling involves demonstrating a reading skill or strategy, and it includes 'talk-alouds'. 'Talk-alouds' (or 'think-alouds') are when the teacher expresses orally what she is doing and why during a task so that the learners may fully understand the process and its meaning or value. The learners use information from observing 'think-alouds' to help them solve similar problems or tackle similar tasks.

Carnine et al. (2010: 6) define *direct instruction* as, "...an ongoing effort to teach essential reading skills in a highly effective and efficient manner." Rupley (2009:122-123) uses the terms 'direct' and 'explicit' instruction synonymously, and adds that it is active and reflective teaching.

There is a difference between the term Direct Instruction (with capital D and I) and direct instruction (lower case d and i). The term *Direct Instruction* refers to a particular beginning reading programme called 'Direct Instruction for Teaching Arithmetic and Reading' (DISTAR), which was authored by Sigfried Engelmann and his colleagues, whereas *direct instruction*, refers to instructional (teaching) techniques (Carnine et al. 2010:7-9).

Carnine et al. (2010:14) describe 'systematic instruction' as including

- a planned, logically progressive sequence of knowledge units, e.g., when letter/sound relationships are taught in a logical sequence;



- clearly defined objectives;
- the planned allocation of practice to build fluency and retention; and
- planned work on new examples to apply prior knowledge.

Knowing what direct and systematic instruction entails is part of understanding how to effectively deliver reading instruction. A review of how to apply direct and systematic instruction within the five main elements of reading will ensure a better understanding of what constitutes effective beginning reading instruction.

#### **2.4.1.2 Phonemic awareness**

*Phonemic awareness* is the awareness that speech is made up of sounds, called phonemes (smallest units of a spoken language), and these phonemes can be manipulated in a variety of ways (Carnine et al. 2010:50). Phonemes combine to form words and syllables. However, some words only have one phoneme, e.g., /a/ I saw **a** cat. There are approximately 41 phonemes in English (although some authors mention 44) (Ehri, Nunes, Willows, Schuster, Yaghoub-Zadeh & Shanahan 2001:253; Walpole & McKenna 2007:35).

Although the terms ‘phonemic awareness’ and ‘phonological awareness’ have been used by some researchers and authors interchangeably, they are different. *Phonological awareness* is an umbrella term, of which phonemic awareness is one component (Caldwell & Leslie 2013:47). *Phonological awareness* includes the awareness of larger and smaller parts of the spoken language. It includes syllables, onset and rime (discussed under phonics) and phonemes (Carnine et al. 2010:50; Scanlon et al. 2010:77).

Harrison (2004:41) believes that learners cannot benefit from phonics instruction if they do not possess phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness contributes to a learner’s ability to understand and acquire the alphabetic principle (the letters of the alphabet represent phonemes or speech sounds) (Manyak 2008:659). Shanker and Cockrum (2009:15) state that, “Phonemic awareness has been shown to be the most casual factor that distinguishes successful from disabled readers”.

Phonemic awareness instruction has to indicate to the learners that spoken words are made up of different sounds (phonemes), and is an integral part of beginning reading instruction (Shanker & Cockrum 2009:16-17). The NRP (2000:4-7) devoted their entire chapter 2 to phonemic awareness and they advised (among others) that learners can be taught phonemic awareness (preferably in small groups), that teaching one or two phonemic awareness skills is more beneficial than teaching multiple skills, and that the use of letters in teaching phonemic awareness is more effective than without letters. Caldwell and Leslie (2013:57) support the use of letters as soon as the learners are able to recognize and identify (associate) phonemes with them.

Instruction in phonemic awareness includes the use of poems, stories, riddles and songs (Scanlon et al. 2010:86; Gunning 2014:214). Yopp and Yopp (2000:132-134), who have been cited in several books and articles, suggest that phonemic awareness instruction should include child-appropriate songs, nursery rhymes, riddles, word games and storybooks; it must be fun and engaging, and must have a clear and purposeful goal.

Direct instruction in phonemic awareness includes rhyming abilities, initial sound recognition, phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation, recognizing the number of sounds, and ending-sound recognition (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:7-8).

These aspects of phonemic awareness instruction are all closely related and often overlap in instructional procedures. The plethora of books and articles consulted had similar instructional practices to develop phonemic awareness.

The suggestions to improve phonemic awareness include:

Rhyming abilities – Teach rhyming skills using songs, poems and nursery rhymes. Read and discuss rhymes with the learners, using the opportunity to introduce vocabulary related to rhyme, such as different sounds, same sounds, rhyme and words, to name a few (Gunning 2014:206). Let the learners indicate each time they hear a rhyming word by clapping their hands, stomping their feet or showing a colour. Ask the learners for additional rhyming words, and also ask for alternative rhyming words to those used in the text (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:7). Gunning (2014:207) suggests the use of ‘sorting’ (objects or pictures according to the same sounds) to reinforce the concept of rhyme. He further explains that

concrete objects should be used first as the learners initially respond better to them than to pictures. Scanlon et al. (2010:89) support the idea of sorting, and add that objects and pictures can be sorted according to beginning sounds, rhyme, ending sounds and medial sounds. Scanlon et al. (2010:90) recommend that objects/pictures have the same names throughout a variety of tasks, e.g., if you call it a /rug/, then do not change it later to a /mat/.

Initial sound recognition – Begin with one-syllable words (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:7). Dr. Seuss ('There's a Wocket in My Pocket') is an excellent book to introduce beginning sounds. Play games where the learners change the initial phoneme in words to form new words, e.g., There's a nook in my book. Use sorting, as mentioned above. Final-sound sorting is similar, but with the last sound.

Phoneme blending – Select one-syllable words for this. Carefully sound out each phoneme very slowly, e.g., /b/ /a/ /t/ and ask the learners to tell you what the word is. Increase the speed between each phoneme as the learners improve their phonemic awareness (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:7). The essence of blending is to blend sounds to make a word (Walpole & McKenna 2007:35).

Phoneme segmentation – This is possibly the most difficult part of phonemic analysis (Scanlon et al. 2010:99). The focus of phoneme segmentation is to identify sounds in words (Walpole & McKenna 2007:35). Start with two phonemes, e.g., go - /g/o/. This is important for the vowels too, e.g., eat - /ea/t. Words beginning with a vowel are easier to segment than consonants. A technique called the 'Elkonin technique' (Elkonin 1973) (Walpole & McKenna 2007:43-44) is a method that teaches phonemic awareness by having children put markers in boxes to show how many phonemes a word has. The learners are given a picture of an object (such as a hat) with boxes (copied on a piece of paper that matches the number of sounds in the chosen word) underneath. As the learner says the word he/she pushes the marker (like a button) into the relevant block to indicate the individual phonemes. When the learners understand the process it is no longer necessary to use the same number of boxes as sounds. They can use a standard set of boxes consisting of four or five boxes. This technique can be used to identify the number of sounds too, as well as for initial sound recognition. (Gunning 2014:209; Cockrum & Shanker 2013:10; Scanlon et al. 2013:100-103).

Phoneme deletion – The NRP (2000:2) also encourages instruction in phoneme deletion. This is when one phoneme is deleted and the learner must say what the remaining word is, e.g., “What is /smile/ without the /s/?” = /mile/.

Every learner possesses different phonemic awareness abilities and this should be considered when planning instruction. Not all of the aforementioned aspects of phonemic awareness should be taught in one lesson. Some learners may need extensive repetition in certain activities. Instruction should slow down or progress according to the needs of the group/s (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:8).

#### **2.4.1.3 Phonics instruction**

Phonics instruction is a vital part of any reading programme (NRP 2000). Failure to master phonics and related word-analysis skills is possibly the primary cause of reading problems (Gunning 2014:224). The importance of phonics instruction places a huge responsibility on the teacher to ensure that her instructional practices are effective. If the learners are unable to decode words accurately, they are certainly going to battle to read.

Gillet et al. (2012:137-139) encourage the use of phonics instruction for beginner readers and they explain Stahl’s (1992) ten components of effective phonics teaching as follows, namely that phonics teaching

1. builds on what the learners already know – the learners gain knowledge of books, reading, and how print functions by being read to, by the shared reading of predictable books and by participating in authentic reading and writing exercises before reading begins. This instruction incorporates elements from both whole language and phonics;
2. builds on a foundation of phonemic awareness – phonics instruction builds on a learner’s ability to recognize and manipulate phonemes (speech sounds);
3. is clear and direct – effective teachers explain exactly what they mean, leaving nothing to chance. It is important to directly show the children the common and predictable consonant sounds;
4. is integrated as part of a total reading programme – phonics instruction should not be the primary tool of reading but should rather be a part of a balanced reading programme. Phonics instruction should not consist of more than 25% of the

- instructional time. The phonics skills taught must be relevant to the text being read at that time. They must not just be random or arbitrary skills that are not linked or related to text, other than in a short or insignificant paragraph. If the learners are learning the short /a/ sound then they should have many opportunities to read rich literature with that sound prominent (also called phonetically regular) in the text, such as Dr. Seuss' 'The Cat in the Hat'. Gunning (2014: 231) support this practice;
5. focuses on reading words, not learning rules – rules are fraught with exceptions, so they are not useful to all learners, especially not to those who battle to read. It is more effective to show the readers patterns in similar words to use as a tool to decode, e.g., make/take/. The pattern of /ake/ will enable a learner to decode an unfamiliar word like /fake/. Caldwell and Leslie (2013:71) support these findings, and add that learning rules is fruitless as they apply in less than 50% of the time;
  6. may include onsets and rimes – these are also known as word families. Onsets are the beginning sounds and rimes are the part of the word or syllable from the vowel onwards. Analysing onset and rimes allows the children to decode unfamiliar words and is easier than sounding out individual sounds. The previous example of the words, /make/take/ to decode /fake/, are examples of using rimes to analyse the spelling pattern;
  7. may include invented spelling practice – using invented spelling helps the children to use and enhance their decoding strategies. Gunning (2014:265) supports the use of writing to reinforce letter/sound relationships and also encourages invented spelling. However, not all researchers agree with the use of invented spelling (McGuinness 2004:120);
  8. may include categorization practice, such as word sorting – the learners group words with common phonic elements together, such as beginning consonants and phonogram patterns (like the /ake/ example earlier on). The practice of word-sorting teaches the children to analyse parts of the word/s they do know to help decode and spell unknown words;
  9. focuses attention on the internal structure of words – the learners must be taught to see and use patterns in words, as they learn to read and spell from the association of these patterns;
  10. develops automaticity in word recognition – the essence of good phonics instruction is to produce automaticity (recognizing words quickly) in reading, not to compromise comprehension by the laboriously sounding-out of each word.

The emphasis on focusing on what a learner does know to help decode words they do not know indicates the importance of this concept. Shanker and Cockrum (2009:65) support this notion and concur that teaching a vast number of rules is ineffective, especially for the vowel sounds in English. They explain that the use of phonograms (a word-family beginning with a vowel or vowel pairs followed by a consonant/s) is an effective approach for learning letter/sound associations for vowels, e.g., /at/, /ed/, /it/, /up/, /an/ etc. Using phonograms enables the learners to decode many words, as the word endings are often pronounced the same in a variety of words, e.g., /fat//cat//sat/. Gunning (2014:236) also advocates using a learner's prior knowledge to teach phonics, especially for consonant clusters (also known as blends or onsets, e.g., bl- in black).

An important and early part of phonics instruction involves teaching letter/sound correspondence. Consonant letter/sound relationships are easier to learn due to consonants being pronounced in the same way in most words (Caldwell & Leslie 2013:72; Jennings et al. 2010:196). Gunning (2014:243) advocates a multisensory approach to teaching letter names and letter sounds, especially for children struggling to read. This includes using a learner's kinesthetic (movement or physical activity) and tactile (touch) senses to support auditory and visual senses, e.g., Say the letter sound, then the learners say the letter sound while writing it on sandpaper or in the air. Walpole and McKenna (2007:56-57) state that the learners have to learn the letter sounds so that they are able to recognize and say them automatically. They advocate the use of a strategy called 'distributed practice' (a brief repetitive practice every day) for instruction in letter names and letter sounds. The teachers use alphabet letter cards, tiles, magnetic or foam letters to engage in daily practice of letter names and letter sounds. The teacher also encourages writing the letters on paper or on 'dry erase boards'.

Carnine et al. (2010:62-63) advise that the teachers must teach similar visual or auditory letters separately, e.g., /b/d/ look similar and /f/v/ sound similar. They support teaching more useful letters first, being those that appear most often in words, e.g., /s/a/t/i/ are more useful than /j/q/z/x/. The introduction of one sound per letter is preferable, as it can be confusing for beginner readers to be introduced to all the sounds simultaneously.

Walpole and McKenna (2007:58) encourage the teachers to demonstrate and verbalise what they are doing to ensure explicit instruction. Scanlon et al. (2010:19-20) agree with this, and explain how the theory of Vygotsky (1978) also supports careful guidance by the teacher.

When a teacher guides the learners through verbalization (also called ‘think-alouds’), the learners internalize this as inner speech and use it when they need to. Vygotsky believed that when a teacher guides a learner, he/she can achieve more than if not assisted at all. Vygotsky called this the ‘zone of proximal development’, that is the phase at which a learner can achieve or master a task if given sufficient help (Woolfolk 2010:47). Scaffolding is incredibly valuable as well, and it includes supporting the learners by giving them clues, reminders, encouragement, or by providing examples, which are all examples of good teaching, but especially relevant to phonics instruction (Woolfolk 2010:50).

Phonics must be combined with meaning. The learners must constantly ask themselves as they read, “Does this make sense?” (Jennings et al. 2010:200). Carnine et al. (2010:88) state that during the early months of beginning reading the learners need daily reading instruction lessons, including phonemic awareness exercises and letter/sound correspondence exercises. Carnine et al. (ibid) specify that when the learners have learned at least six to eight letter/sound correspondences, then word-reading exercises can begin. They also recommend that basic ‘sounding-out’ should begin with vowel/consonant (VC) and consonant/vowel/consonant (CVC) regular words e.g., VC=at, CVC=cat (Carnine et al. 2010:88).

The teachers have many resources available to help them to teach phonics effectively, including the use of technology. There are many websites available that support phonics instruction, including <http://www.starfall.com> (Gunning 2014:266-268). The teachers must make lessons fun to avoid phonics being monotonous and boring. They must be as creative as possible, using poems, games, raps, dance and movement to ensure that the phonics lessons are interesting (Harrison 2004:47).

#### **2.4.1.4 Vocabulary instruction**

There are two types of vocabulary, namely oral and reading. *Oral* vocabulary includes the words a learner uses or recognizes in listening. *Reading* vocabulary refers to the words recognized or used in print. For learners to be successful at school they have to be able to understand the vocabulary the teacher uses to present lessons, rules or directions. When the learners learn to read (for comprehension) they have to understand the meaning of the words in the texts. When they have learned to read, vocabulary instruction related to reading must

be part of the daily instruction (Carnine et al. 2010: 108). Cockrum and Shanker (2013:207) assert that the main goal of reading vocabulary instruction is “...to develop an association between the printed form of a word and its meaning or meanings”.

Oral vocabulary instruction is an important aspect of beginning reading. Having a good oral vocabulary enables a learner to better identify words in print (Jennings et al. 2010:244). The more words a learner knows, the easier it is to learn and acquire new words in their vocabulary (Walpole & McKenna 2007:85). Scanlon et al. (2010:256) claim that most of the words that the learners know the meanings of have been acquired incidentally through conversations and/or through being read to. Learners arrive at school with varying sets of vocabulary. The teachers must be mindful of this, as some learners will need additional time and help in increasing their vocabularies (Walpole & McKenna 2007:87; Coyne, McCoach, Loftus, Zipoli & Kapp 2009:2).

The NRP (2000:3) identified the five main methods of teaching vocabulary as

1. Explicit instruction: The students are given definitions or other attributes of words to be learned.
2. Implicit instruction: The students are exposed to words or given opportunities to do a great deal of reading.
3. Multimedia methods: Vocabulary is taught by going beyond the text to include other media such as graphic representations.
4. Capacity methods: Practice is emphasized to increase capacity through making reading automatic.
5. Association methods: The learners are encouraged to draw connections between what they do know and the words they encounter that they do not know.

One particular limitation of the NRP study, as noted by Walpole and McKenna (2007:86), was that the study on vocabulary instruction was based primarily on older learners. They cautioned to simply apply the results from their study to all learners.

Vocabulary instruction must initially be presented orally, and can be done by using modeling, synonyms and definitions (Carnine et al. 2010:108-109). Oral vocabulary instruction includes both embedded (teaching for breadth) and extended (teaching for depth) instruction.



Coyne et al. (2009:1-3) discuss the benefits and limitations of embedded and extended vocabulary instruction as follows:

Embedded vocabulary instruction (the number of word meanings in a learner's lexicon): This type of instruction introduces specific (also called target) word meanings during storybook readings in a time-efficient way (briefly). The brief definitions of target words allow for many words to be introduced during instructional time. The word meanings are given within the context of a story, making them more meaningful. The limitations of embedded instruction are that due to the brief exposure to word meanings there may not be enough time for repetition and the consolidation of definitions. The learners are limited to words relevant to particular contexts and are not active participants in acquiring the word meanings.

Walpole and McKenna (2007:87) claim that teaching learners word meanings during 'read-alouds' is an acceptable and well-researched way to improve vocabulary instruction. However, they maintain that the learners have to interact while the meanings are explained. Interaction includes encouraging the learners to ask questions and make comments during the reading, as well as during discussions after the reading session.

Cockrum and Shanker (2013:207-2009) state that the words selected for direct instruction should be those words relevant to what is being currently read. They claim that using a learner's prior knowledge to teach new words is effective; and they also recommend small cooperative groups.

Extended vocabulary instruction (how well the learner knows the word meanings): The learners' understanding of the meaning of words varies from no knowledge, partial knowledge to complete knowledge (Coyne et al. 2009:1-3). Coyne et al. go on to explain that the depth of word knowledge is important because how well a word is known determines whether or not it can be distinguished from other words and understood in new contexts. Walpole and McKenna (2007:89) support the understanding that word knowledge constitutes various phases or degrees. Having sufficient depth of knowledge supports comprehension. To develop depth of vocabulary knowledge provides the learners with many opportunities to discuss and interact with words outside story readings, in other contexts. This also implies that each word is taught and reinforced over an extended period of time. The learners are encouraged through activities to engage in rich dialogue concerning words and their

meanings. The limitation of extended vocabulary instruction is that it is time-consuming, with the result that fewer target words are taught. This also poses a problem for teachers who have to decide which words are to be taught (Coyne et al. 2009:3-4).

Scanlon et al. (2010:259-261) suggest that instruction to support the development of vocabulary should include the explicit instruction of a few 'generally useful' words from books read during 'read-alouds'. They explain how words can be divided into three tiers, according to Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2002), as follows:

Tier 1: These are the most basic words, and do not require instruction in schools for learners who speak English as their mother tongue. They include words like 'house', 'boy' and 'hand'.

Tier 2: These are high-frequency words that often appear in a variety of texts. These are used in the written and oral language of mature language-users.

Tier 3: These are words that are not used often. They apply to certain contexts, e.g., stamen, voltage. These words should be taught when they are needed in specific content areas.

Beck et al. (2002 in Scanlon et al. 2010:259-261) suggest that tier 2 words should form most of the vocabulary instruction. They are best taught after a storybook activity as the story provides the context for the words to be understood and can easily be explained to younger learners. Beck et al. (2002 in Scanlon et al. 2010:259-261) also advise making sure that the chosen words are useful in many contexts, and can be used by learners to describe their own experiences. Words that are related to other words that the learners are learning or topics in the classroom are valuable for instruction. The learners should also be encouraged to use new words in speaking, reading and writing activities. The teacher should provide feedback to the learners to further promote their learning of vocabulary.

The importance of oral vocabulary, particularly in beginning reading instruction is important as it helps the learners to later understand what they are reading. Storybook reading ('read-alouds') is recommended for beginner readers for teaching tier 2 words. The learners must be encouraged to actively engage in activities, questioning, answering questions and discussing the text before, during and after reading. The teachers provide scaffolding by explaining the

new words to the learners within suitable contexts, by providing pictures and using familiar words to teach unfamiliar words, by using familiar words to teach new words and by providing multiple opportunities to review words (Coyne et al. 2009:16; Caldwell & Leslie 2013:146-147).

#### **2.4.1.5 Reading fluency**

According to the NRP (2000:1), “Fluent readers can read text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression”. Fluent readers are able to identify familiar and unfamiliar (never seen before) words accurately and instantaneously, and to read with expression. The readers must ultimately understand that the purpose of reading is comprehension (Jennings et al. 2010:215-216). Instruction in fluency should never be about how fast a learner can read and by constantly trying to beat their personal time at the expense of punctuation, intonation and comprehension (Marcell & Ferraro 2013:608). Rasinski (2006:704) posits that fluency assists with comprehension. Carnine et al. (2010:139) indicate that fluency instruction should only begin when a learner can read a story consisting of 30 or more words.

Rasinski (2014:26) states that reading fluency has two important components, namely accurate word recognition and prosodic or expressive reading. He suggests the following methods of instruction to develop fluency:

*Assisted reading*, where developing readers are supported by more proficient readers who read with the learners during oral reading. This includes group reading and paired reading. Learners can also read with the help of technology-assisted reading (the reader listens to a fluent recording of the text while reading). Walpole and McKenna (2007:73) support assisted-reading, and indicate that various levels of assisted reading exist. They state that *echo reading* is when a learner needs a high level of support, so the teacher reads one line and the learner or group rereads it aloud. *Choral reading* involves the teacher leading the learner or group reading aloud in unison. *Partner reading* occurs when a pair of readers alternate reading aloud. *Whisper reading* is when learners need the least support, and involves each learner reading aloud (not in unison) in a quiet voice. Wilson (2011:153) supports the notion of assisted reading.

All of the instructional methods discussed to promote fluency incorporate aspects of an instructional strategy referred to as ‘fluency-orientated reading instruction’ (FORI) (Walpole & McKenna 2007:81-83). FORI includes repeated reading, assisted reading and discussion to ensure the comprehension of text read.

*Repeated reading* involves reading a text several times, and will be discussed in greater detail below.

Beginner readers will sound out words in a short passage of story reading. The use of phonics and fluency need to be taught and practiced together in beginning reading instruction. This combination can be achieved with the use of poetry through repeated reading (Rasinski, Rupley & Nichols 2008a:258). The use of repeated reading instruction, even in Grade 1, is a recommended method for fostering fluency. Rasinski (2006:706) explains that in a study on the use of repeated reading (using poetry), Grade 1 learners made significant overall gains in fluency.

Rasinski et al. (2008a:258-259) explain using poetry to foster phonics and fluency as follows: Step 1: The teacher chooses a word family, e.g., /ay/. The learners and the teacher brainstorm to think of words with this spelling and write them on a ‘word wall’ (piece of paper stuck on a wall with the heading /ay/ with relevant words written below). Throughout the week the words are reviewed and new words are added at any time.

Step 2: The words are now seen in context in the form of rhyming poetry, e.g., ‘Rain, rain, go away, Come again another day, Little Johnny wants to play’. The teacher reads the poem while pointing to the words, making sure the learners are looking at the words she is pointing at. Once the poem has been memorized, the teacher chooses individual words from the poem (including /ay/ and other words), e.g., /little/, /again/. If an appropriate poem cannot be found the teacher is at liberty to write her own.

Step 3: After the poem has been thoroughly read in a variety of ways (whole-group choral, together with a peer, alternating lines with a peer, solo, silently, etc.) the teacher guides the learners in selecting interesting words from the poem, including words from the ‘word family’ and other words. These words are then written on a piece of paper, displayed in the

classroom and read several times. Activities that follow include ‘word sorting’ (according to different attributes selected by the teacher).

Following this procedure allows the learners to achieve mastery of chosen ‘word families’ (and other words) in and out of context, which promotes fluency. Marcell and Ferraro (2013:608-610) support the use of poetry to improve fluency in beginner readers. They state that the use of poetry helps to promote the “integration of fluency’s multiple facets - rate, expression, accuracy, and learning”. Marcell and Ferraro use their instructional lesson based on the fluency development lesson (FDL) by Rasinski (2014: 27). Marcell and Ferraro (2013:608-610) adjusted the FDL procedure slightly, and describe the procedure they follow to improve fluency with the use of poetry (and superheroes) as follows:

1. Introduce the superheroes and their enemies prior to reading the poem aloud for the first time. The teacher explains that there is a ‘bad guy’ in reading called Robot Reader, who wants the learners to read like a robot (she models this for the learners). She explains that Robot Reader has many friends, such as Choppy Boy, who wants the learners to chop words up as they read (word-for-word reading, again demonstrated by the teacher, using a chopping hand movement). Alien Dude wants the learners to read with no understanding, and Flat Man wants them to read with no expression (the teacher demonstrates). The teacher then introduces the superheroes who help the learners read better, namely Poetry Power Man, Super Scooper (goes against Choppy Boy), Captain Comprehension (against Alien Dude) and Expression Man (against Flat Man).
2. Read-aloud - The poem of the week is handed out and the teacher first reads it aloud. The teacher then indicates to the learners that they may sound like Robot Reader or Choppy Boy at first, but with help will read better by the end of the week. The teacher shows the learners how Choppy Boy reads, and then how Super Scooper reads (because young learners are not able to see phrase boundaries easily). Super Scooper scoops three or four words together to make reading sound more like talking. The teacher has pictures of all the characters at hand and picks one up every time she demonstrates the reading skill or the lack thereof. Marcell and Ferraro explain how they cut small pictures of each character and glued the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ characters opposite each other on an ice-cream stick. This

enabled them to simply turn the stick around to get the opposite character required at any given time during a reading instruction lesson.

3. Discuss the content.
4. Choral reading – Scooping words. A copy of the poem is sent home for practice.
5. Read the poem again, modeling expression (Flat Man versus Expression Man).
6. Read the poem again. Discuss how the poem relates to a learner's life or life experiences (Captain Comprehension versus Alien Dude).
7. Word study (of phrases or words and their meanings and connections relevant to each learner. Can be done with partners).
8. Performances – The learners perform the poem (in small groups or as a class) on the last day of the week, with expression.

Marcell and Ferraro (2013:613) believe that repeated reading with the use of poetry (incorporating super-heroes) assists the learners with fluency and enables them to learn many new words in an exciting and meaningful way. Rasinski, Rupley and Nichols (2008b:10-11) state that providing scaffolded repeated practice (which is assistance from the teacher who models fluency) is far more beneficial than the learners merely practicing on their own. Rasinski et al. (2008b:11) maintain that the performance of the poetry allows the learners to understand that repeated reading is both meaningful and authentic and that reading is ultimately enjoyable.

#### **2.4.1.6 Reading comprehension**

Many researchers have called *comprehension* the essence of reading (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:221). The NRP (2000:1, 5) stated in chapter four of their report that comprehension is vital to the development of the learners' reading skills. The Panel claim, among others, that explicit instruction of comprehension strategies helps the learners in developing the understanding of text. Carnine et al. (2010:117, 122) postulate that during the beginning stage of reading comprehension, instruction should include:

1. Direct instruction in foundational language skills, which are a requirement for comprehension.
2. Stories read orally to the learners by the teacher. This would assist the learners with acquiring the background knowledge needed for later reading comprehension,

improving vocabulary and in listening comprehension skills, as well as modeling how to make inferences.

3. Teaching comprehension related to the text that the learners read. Due to the limited reading ability of beginner readers most of the texts they read are simple and comprehension will be primarily literal.

Gill (2008:109-110) concurs with Carnine et al. (2010: 117, 122) and adds that comprehension strategies that are valuable include activating prior knowledge, generating questions while reading, visualizing the text, summarizing and analyzing the structure of stories.

Stebick and Dain (2007:2) support the aforementioned notion and use an instructional framework called 'Before, During and After' (BDA), which promotes comprehension. BDA uses texts to "model comprehension strategies, provide guided practice and offer opportunities for independent application". BDA includes activating prior knowledge, interacting with the text through questioning, visualizing, making inferences, determining importance and organizing and re-creating new ideas (Stebick & Dain 2007:2-14).

Activating prior knowledge – In order to construct meaning it is important to connect new information with older knowledge (Stebick & Dain 2007:20). The learners have to activate their schemas (this is information already in the memory and is used to make connections) in order to comprehend (Gregory & Cahill 2010:515). Gunning (2014:366) explains *schema* (schemata is the plural form) as "abstract representations of knowledge organized and stored in the memory". The teacher activates the learners' prior knowledge by relating new information to previous stories (or television programmes), texts or situations in the learners' own lives (Caldwell & Leslie 2013:175). A learner with many diverse and rich experiences which are well-organised, will have a richer and more useful schemata (Gunning 2014:367). Learners also have schemata for how stories are told. This means that if they read a fable they look for a moral or lesson and if the teacher reads a mystery the learners know to listen for clues. Schemata also help the learners to make inferences. If a fable has a wolf in it, then the learners can infer that the wolf intends to cause harm (Gunning 2014:367).

Generating questions – The learners must be encouraged to ask questions in respect of the text before, during and after reading. A chart (referred to as an 'anchor chart') can be used to

write questions on and to model this strategy. It may also be used to get the learners to become active participants and to engage critically with the text (story). When the learners answer questions, their answers can be written on the chart and connections can also be made to relevant aspects of the text. The learners also get to see if their initial questions were answered explicitly in the text or whether they had to make inferences (Gregory & Cahill 2010:517-518). Questions allow the learners to assimilate new information and to reorganize and add to their schemas, as well as to distinguish important from unimportant facts (Stebick & Dain 2007:31). Questions can also be used to understand aspects of the story such as the setting, the characters, the plot and the theme (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:245). Making predictions is also an important aspect in the questioning process (and also activates prior knowledge). The learners should be encouraged to predict what the story is about by reading the title and the first few lines. For younger learners, pictures can be shown from the story to generate predictions (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:243-244; Gunning 2014:375).

Focus on the structure of the text – Text structure is also referred to as *story grammar*. This is taught by beginning with a simple well-structured story with a few important characters and a clearly-defined goal, e.g., The Three Little Pigs. Always explain the purpose of learning the structure of the story, that is, namely that stories have parts which, if understood, help in remembering the story better. Explain explicitly who the main characters are and how to determine who they are (appear more often in story). Teach setting, time, place, the aim of the character/s (what they want to achieve), problems (that which hinder the character from attaining the goal), events (explain to the learners which events lead to the solution) and finally, teach the solution or resolution (whether the goal or problem was achieved or solved). This must all be taught explicitly through the teacher's modeling (Caldwell & Leslie 2013:176).

Visualization (Developing mental images) – It is believed that learners who comprehend well are able to visualize and develop mental images. Mental images “provide the framework for organizing and remembering the text” (Stebick & Dain 2007:50). Creating mental images also makes reading more meaningful for the learners because they construct their own unique mental images (Jennings *et al.* 2010:291). It is therefore important that the teachers help the learners to develop mental images (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:238). To begin with, the teachers can help the learners to construct mental images through listening activities (Jennings *et al.* 2010:292). To develop the construction of mental images, the teachers have



to use texts that support the creation of images; group discussions must be used to retrieve these images and the teachers must model the use of mental images for comprehension through ‘think-alouds’ (Block & Pressley 2000, in Stebick & Dain 2007:50).

Other important strategies for developing comprehension are ‘retelling’ and the use of drama. The learners must be encouraged to retell the story to ensure they fully understood it. Retelling shows how a learner has mentally organized the information comprehended. This also enables the teacher to correct any misconceptions or errors. The teacher can provide scaffolding in guided retelling by initially providing the learners with illustrations to assist them (Gunning 2014:418). Acting the story out is an exciting way of assisting the learners to remember the story and to make connections with aspects or characters from the story (Jennings et al. 2010:280, 300).

#### **2.4.2 Summary**

The teachers have to teach the aforementioned strategies explicitly to the learners by using a variety of contexts to thoroughly understand and apply each strategy. The teacher has to model strategies through ‘think-alouds’ (Gunning 2014:370, 422), and use as many ‘scaffolds’ as necessary to help the learners to acquire the ability to read. Reading stories, poems, engaging in drama and using movement are enjoyable activities used in teaching reading. It is essential to make beginning reading instruction fun in order to foster a lifelong love of reading among the learners.

### **2.5 CATERING FOR DIVERSITY IN BEGINNER READING INSTRUCTION**

#### **2.5.1 Introduction**

All stakeholders involved in reading instruction have as their unanimous goal the desire to help all learners to read to the best of their abilities (Gambrell, Malloy & Mazzoni 2007:12); this includes learners from diverse cultures and language backgrounds.

*Culture* is described by Woolfolk (2010:158) as the knowledge, values, attitudes, beliefs and traditions that direct the behaviour of a particular group of people. The culture of a particular

group is communicated from generation to generation, and members of the culture understand its beliefs (Woolfolk 2010:158). Classrooms throughout the world consist of learners from different cultures. The policy of the United States of America, as of many other countries the world over, is to respect cultural diversity. Instead of trying to assimilate different cultures into the mainstream of society like a cultural ‘melting pot’, multiculturalism - where all cultures are part of society - is the goal (Woolfolk 2010:167-168).

### **2.5.2 Language**

Part of having diverse cultures is having learners in a class who speak a language other than the language of learning and teaching. Teachers need to be equipped to teach learners from diverse backgrounds (Roy-Campbell 2013:255). It is estimated that more than 450 languages are spoken by English Language Learners in schools in the United States. An *English Language Learner* (ELL) is a child (or learner) who does not have English as their first language (referred to in chapter 1, and henceforth as ESL) (Roy-Campbell 2013:257).

Learners entering school who do not speak English as their mother tongue will need to acquire language (English) for two purposes, namely for conversational and academic purposes. Jim Cummings (1980) used the terms, ‘basic interpersonal communication skills’ (BICS) and ‘cognitive academic language proficiency’ (CALP) to distinguish between the two purposes of language (Peregoy & Boyle 2013:46). *BICS* are the language skills needed in one’s daily life for a variety of social situations; whereas *CALP* refers to formal academic learning, and includes skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (especially content areas). *CALP* is essential for learners to succeed in school (Bonenfant 2012:101-102). Learners develop interpersonal social language in two to three years; however, they take four to seven years to develop academic language proficiency (Trumbull & Pacheco 2005:65). Teachers need to be aware of the fact that those learners who show conversational fluency are not necessarily at the correct level of academic language (*CALP*) and still need support to develop the academic aspects of the language (Cummings 2000:76).

Bylund (2011:4-5) uses a Vygotskian framework to help understand BICS and CALP. He explains how learners (children) learn by means of social interaction with others. This helps them to acquire BICS by means of daily interaction and socialization with peers and teachers

who speak English as their mother tongue. The teachers model and scaffold the correct use of language on a daily basis. The learners also need to use language for more complex thought processes. CALP involves the intersection of thought and language. Learners progress from using words to understanding and using concepts at a later stage. It is part of Vygotsky's belief that language begins with the "disorganized assignment of symbols (words) to various objects, and culminating in a final stage of mature conceptual thinking". Language is viewed as a cognitive tool which is used in complex thought processes.

Background knowledge plays an important role in the use of academic language. It is believed that increased background knowledge affords learners the ability to engage with more complex subject matter. The teachers need to plan instruction that is understandable to the learners and which promotes the development of academic language. They can use concrete objects, repetitions and paraphrases to contextualize their 'academic talk'. It is important for the teachers to use academic language so as to model it appropriately for the learners (Peregoy & Boyle 2013:50).

### **2.5.3 Instructional practices to cater for diversity**

Catering for the diverse needs of all learners is an integral part of this study. A discussion will follow of how to cater specifically for ESL learners, as well as the role of first language and reading.

Although many of the abovementioned instructional strategies for beginner readers (the five main elements) are relevant to all learners, careful consideration needs to be done when teaching ESL learners (Manyak & Bauer 2008:432). What is of concern to teachers is that many ESL learners do not do as well - in reading, specifically - as those learners who have English as their mother tongue. Research, unfortunately, does not adequately supply all the answers to the questions in respect of effective instructional practices for ESL learners (McIntyre, Kyle, Chen, Munoz & Beldon 2010:334). However, there is growing support for the use of the language-experience approach (LEA) to teach beginning reading to ESL learners (Peregoy & Boyle 2013:329).

The LEA entails that the learners dictate sentences to the teacher which then become the basis for reading. This means that the learners' own interests and life experiences are used in

the reading process. The LEA incorporates the learners' culture and background knowledge, making it meaningful and relevant for them. The LEA affords the learners the opportunity to read their sentences (stories) to one another, to make 'big books' which are published for all the learners to read, to discuss vocabulary, to identify words, and to connect reading with writing (Peregoy & Boyle 2013:329-331). Oldrieve (2012:29-34) suggests the use of the LEA to develop and build oral reading fluency and sight words, and to strengthen language skills. He indicates that the dictated sentences can be used for repeated reading by the learners to their family members; certain words can be selected for phonics and phonemic awareness lessons; sight words can be written on 'word walls', and the sentences can be cut up and scrambled in order for the learners to place them in the correct sequence. Oldrieve (2012:30) firmly believes that the five elements of reading recommended by the NRP can successfully be integrated into the LEA lessons. He adapted the standard LEA lesson in the following ways: the learners orally compose sentences with 'sight' and 'meaning' vocabulary words from a story, a book or a chapter they will be reading for comprehension later in the week. The words used are placed on the 'word wall' in the classroom. Oldrieve's aim is that the learners should be able to read all the words on the 'wall', allowing them to focus on the meaning of the story.

#### **2.5.3.1 The language experience approach, differentiated instruction and response to intervention**

The LEA forms part of differentiated instruction. *Differentiated instruction* involves providing the learners with tasks and instruction that are appropriate for their level of ability within different areas of reading. It allows the teachers to design lessons and tasks that are suited specifically to the needs of that particular learner (Gillet et al. 2012:19). The teachers work with the learners' zones of proximal development, assisting and guiding (scaffolding) them to achieve to the best of their abilities (Tracey & Morrow 2012:129). The teachers consider the learners' background knowledge, experiences and proficiency in English when planning reading instruction. He or she accommodates the learners by using pictures, charts, demonstrations and pantomime, to name but a few (Peregoy & Boyle 2013:91).

Response to intervention (RTI) also differentiates instruction. It is a model for identifying and offering instruction to learners who need help in certain areas, including in reading (Peregoy & Boyle 2013:92). RTI seeks to enhance the general education instruction in the

classroom in order to help prevent reading difficulties and to identify those learners who have learning disabilities (Wanzek, Roberts, Al Otaiba & Kent 2014:148-149). A framework is in place so that ESL learners are not discriminated against or disadvantaged by RTI. This framework includes looking at the background variables of the ESL learners, namely their first and second language proficiency, socio-economic status, etc. It also includes examining the teacher's classroom instruction and the classroom context; and scrutinizing information from formal and informal assessments; and the non-discriminatory interpretation of all assessment data (Brown & Doolittle 2008:67). Brown and Doolittle (2008:67-70) explain RTI using a Three-Tiered model for ESL learners as follows:

Tier 1: - All the learners receive high quality and appropriate instruction in the general education setting. Progress is monitored regularly (the learners are assessed). The learners are provided with additional support where needed.

Tier 2: - The learners who do not make sufficient progress in Tier 1 receive more intensive support in general education. The interventions are often done and support given by means of small group instruction and may be provided by a specialist (reading specialist, etc.). The learners should receive a 'double dose' of instruction.

Tier 3: - The interventions are more intensive, and include both small group and individual instruction. At this point it will be decided if the learner needs placement in special education.

#### **2.5.3.2 Instruction in phonics and phonemic awareness for ESL learners**

The importance of good quality classroom instruction is essential in helping ESL learners to learn to read. A discussion on what constitutes 'good reading instruction' for ESL learners will provide insight and understanding.

According to Goldenberg (2010:23), research indicates that ESL learners benefit from direct instruction in phonics and phonemic awareness. Instructional strategies that assist in teaching phonemic awareness and phonics include the use of visuals, gestures and facial expressions. The teacher has to provide ample opportunities for the learners to talk and to discuss vocabulary during reading lessons. The use of 'rich' vocabulary instruction (using a variety

of words and discussing their meanings) within the phonics lessons will enable the learners to gain a better understanding of the words they are decoding. If the teacher has a good understanding of the phonological and orthographic similarities and differences between the learners' mother tongue and English, she will be better equipped to provide the explicit instruction which may assist them in overcoming the general problems experienced with some phonics relationships (Manyak & Bauer 2008:432-433). Furthermore, August and Shanahan (2006:3) state that ESL learners require more practice in acquiring the phonemes that do not exist in their home language. Peregoy and Boyle (2013:207) support this, and state that ESL learners generally battle with the English vowels, as do English-speaking learners. Some digraph letter combinations may cause confusion; the teacher must explain the different sounds explicitly during phonics instruction, e.g., /ch/ makes three different sounds; chair, chemist, chef. This is particularly confusing for a learner who is used to a language that has a more consistent letter/sound relationship (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:101).

Huebner (2009:90) indicates that ESL learners are less likely to struggle with phonemic awareness and phonics than with fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. She suggests daily small-group instruction for learners with similar needs, designed specifically to target the areas that the learners are battling with. Small-group instruction also allows the learners to actively participate in the lessons. Peregoy and Boyle (2013:215) mention that small-group instruction allows for differentiated instruction.

### **2.5.3.3 Vocabulary, comprehension and fluency instruction for ESL learners**

Walpole and McKenna (2007:93) indicate that high-quality vocabulary instruction (discussed earlier in this chapter) is beneficial for all learners. August and Shanahan (2006:4-5) suggest that the development of extensive oral English must be included in instruction, and indicate that vocabulary and background knowledge should receive particular attention during instruction. They further explain that oral proficiency and literacy in the learners' mother tongue (first language) can be used to facilitate literacy development in English. Learners who are literate in their mother tongue are better equipped to learn English and benefit from transferring skills from their mother tongue to English. Goldenberg (2008:15-17) explains that if a learner learns something in one language (his or her mother tongue), such as decoding and comprehension, it can be transferred to another language. He does caution, however, that it is not exactly understood what skills do transfer across languages and that the

teachers should not assume that transfer is automatic. Goldenberg (2008:17) avers that it is not always possible for the learners to learn in their mother tongue due to various reasons, including the lack of qualified teachers, or because there are many languages represented in one class and that all cannot be accommodated.

Peregoy and Boyle (2013:229) furthermore state that the following strategies are effective and highly beneficial for ESL learners who are learning new words:

1. Relate the 'new' to the 'known' by using the learner's prior knowledge. This may include using words in the learner's mother tongue to convey the meanings of English words. According to Yahia and Sinatra (2013:153-154), this could be problematic if the use of the learner's mother tongue is limited, as he or she may then be unable to make the appropriate connections.
2. Ensure many repetitions of the new word/s in meaningful contexts.
3. Provide opportunities for the deeper processing of the meanings of words. This can be achieved by means of demonstrations, direct experiences, using concrete examples, and applications to real life.
4. Allow the learners to use their newly learned words in a variety of situations.

Goldenberg (2010: 24) supports these instructional strategies.

Yahia and Sinatra (2013:156) encourage teachers to model sophisticated language by using more 'mature' words where possible during language (and reading) lessons, e.g., 'happy' to 'glad' to 'cheerful' to 'delighted'. Manyak and Bauer (2009:176) suggest that the teacher can help ESL learners by slowing down her speech, simplifying grammar and using multiple synonyms. They also suggest the use of drama to help the learners understand unfamiliar words. Peregoy and Boyle (2013:114) indicate that a good classroom routine provides scaffolding for the acquisition of language and literacy by repeating language in daily routines.

It is important to focus on reading for meaning with ESL learners, namely to ensure that the learners are familiar with all the vocabulary in a story or text before the reading begins. A 'buddy' who can read well can be assigned to help a learner to read (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:227). Comprehension instruction should include using cooperative learning. This

involves the learners working interdependently to achieve the group instructional tasks and learning goals (Goldenberg 2008:17). Group instruction also allows for interactive discussions between the teacher and the learners. Therefore, the teacher will be able to determine what additional support and feedback each learner needs to ensure comprehension (Goldenberg 2010:27).

No research is available on developing fluency in ESL learners. However, Goldenberg (2010:23) mentions that research indicates that the same strategies used for English learners should benefit ESL learners. Ross and Begeny (2011:605) include the use of small-group instruction and repeated reading to develop and improve fluency.

#### **2.5.3.4 General strategies for ESL learners**

Jennings et al. (2010:374-375) mention the following general strategies to cater for ESL learners:

1. Encourage the use of the learners' first language around the school, e.g., have books in the classroom and library, as well as notices and signs, in various languages
2. Help the learners to understand that reading is based on language and that in order for them to read English, they need to understand the words and sentence structures they will encounter in books.
3. Make use of books written in English. Provide many interesting books for the learners to read, books that contain a repetition of language structures. Predictable reading books which repeat refrains are useful for learning English. Use well-illustrated books with pictures which support the text. Books are also recommended to teach concepts.
4. Provide numerous opportunities to use English.
5. Talk about books to foster language use.

It is important to provide a 'print-rich' environment for the learners to develop their reading skills. The learners must hear and see reading throughout the day (Peregoy & Boyle 2013:332). Although research on reading instruction for ESL learners has improved over the past few years, much research is still needed (Goldenberg 2008:12). The above five elements



of reading instruction should not be seen as separate aspects, but should rather be integrated to ensure comprehensive and complete instruction (Goldenberg 2010:21).

#### **2.5.4 Summary**

Reading is a complex activity. Learning to read can be approached from different theoretical perspectives, each with its strengths and weaknesses. It requires careful planning and instruction. Government and national education policies, the school's policy and the individual preferences of the teacher all influence the instructional strategies in the classroom. Although a general consensus has been reached on what constitutes effective reading instruction, researchers and stakeholders involved in reading instruction will continue to engage in healthy debate. Furthermore, reading instruction should cater for all the learners. Classrooms constitute learners from many diverse cultures and language backgrounds; the teachers have to be mindful of the implications this has for effective reading instruction. Good reading instruction includes the support of the teacher who, by means of scaffolding, has to guide all the learners to achieve to the best of their abilities. As research on reading continues, the hope is that it will provide a greater understanding of how to improve instructional practices, especially for the diverse classroom of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The next chapter will focus on reading instruction within the South African context.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **READING INSTRUCTION WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Reading instruction in South Africa has undergone many changes over the past two decades. The dawn of democracy ushered in a diverse classroom context that needs to cater for all learners, not merely a select few. Learners are no longer from one language or culture, but are culturally and linguistically diverse. The single curriculum needs to serve a new and unique nation while trying to bridge the inequalities and injustices of the past (Prinsloo & Janks 2002:29). Languages and the important role they play in learning are recognized, resulting in several changes in the national language policy and language planning (Lemmer 2010:225). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996a), the South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996b) and the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (DoE 1997) have shaped language in education and provide the legal framework for schooling. School readiness also poses a challenge for learners in South Africa. School readiness can be defined as focusing on a child's learning and development, the school environment that helps support and promote learning and families that play an active role in their child's learning and development thereby helping the transition to school ( Britto 2012:7).

The abovementioned policy documents will be reviewed in order to understand the role each has played in the curriculum in South Africa.

#### **3.2 LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION POLICY AND LEGISLATION**

##### **3.2.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa**

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996a) declares education a basic human right for all its citizens. The Constitution (RSA 1996a 29(2)) further indicates that everyone has the right to be educated in an official language or a language of his/her choice as long as it is, "reasonably practicable".

Chapter 1 of the Constitution (RSA 1996a) is devoted to languages and the rights thereof. Point 1 states that, "The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana,

siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.” Point 2, regarding languages, acknowledges the fact that indigenous languages have been diminished in the past and that action has to be taken by the state to, “...elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.” The Constitution furthermore indicates that all the official languages have to be granted equal status. It makes provision for the promotion and development of sign language, as well as the Khoi, Nama and San languages. An ethos of respect for all the other languages used in communities across South Africa is also promoted in the Constitution.

In 1995 the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) was established to ensure that the official languages (including sign language) were, indeed promoted and developed, thus supporting multilingualism (Lemmer 2010:230).

It is evident that the Constitution takes the right to education and language very seriously, and is the compass that guides all the decisions regarding education and language.

### **3.2.2 The South African Schools Act (SASA)**

The SASA (RSA 1996b) is an Act that was designed to steer education towards transformation in a newly democratic South Africa (Lemmer 2010:230). The preamble to the SASA emphasises, among others, the protection and advancement of the diverse cultures and languages in South Africa. Chapter 2 of the SASA, regarding admission to public schools, indicates, “(1) A *public school* must admit *learners* and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way. (2) The *governing body* of a *public school* may not administer any test related to the admission of a *learner* to a *public school* or direct or authorise the *principal* of the *school* or any other person to administer such test.” This has the direct implication that language tests may not be given to learners as part of an admission process or policy, as this clearly discriminates against learners and is in contradiction to the SASA (Lemmer 2010:230).

The SASA (RSA 1996b), Chapter 2, point 6, goes on to further stipulate as part of the language policy of public schools that, “(2) The *governing body* of a *public school* may determine the language policy of the *school* subject to the *Constitution, this Act* and any applicable provincial law. (3) No form of racial discrimination may be practised in

implementing policy determined under this section. (4) A recognised Sign Language has the status of an official language for purposes of learning at a *public school*.” Under point 6B the SASA further emphasizes the non-discrimination of the official languages where it states, “The *governing body* of a *public school* must ensure that—(a) there is no unfair discrimination in respect of any official languages that are offered as subject options contemplated in section 21 (1) (b); and (b) the first additional language and any other official language offered, as provided for in the curriculum, are offered on the same level. [S. 6B inserted by s. 6 of Act No. 15 of 2011]”.

The SASA, guided by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, gives clear direction as to what the governing body of a school may do as regards its language policy. The SASA states that no form of discrimination may be practiced when implementing a language policy in the school (Churr 2013:278).

### **3.2.3 Language in Education Policy**

The LiEP was to serve as a catalyst for nation-building (Lemmer 2010:231). The LiEP (DoE 1997) was a progressive step towards recognising and supporting cultural and language diversity (Pluddemann 2015:189). In the preamble to the LiEP (DoE 1997), point 3 states, “It is meant to facilitate communication across the barriers of colour, language and region, while at the same time creating an environment in which respect for languages other than one’s own would be encouraged.” The LiEP promotes ‘additive bilingualism’ through home language (HL) education with gradual access to additional languages (Lemmer & Manyike 2014:253).

Although the LiEP promotes the use of home language and the right to learn in one’s mother tongue, the majority of learners in South Africa are learning in an additional language to their home language, and are thus ESL learners (Lemmer 2010:233). This poses a problem, as language plays a vital role in affording access to learning. If a learner is learning in a language other than his or her home language, it can compromise the quality of learning (Churr 2013:275). Hugo and Nieman (2010:60) concur that many parents send their children to schools where English is the only language of instruction, and which is often a second language for these children. They add that the LoLT in the classroom can become a barrier to learning and teaching, especially if the teacher is not proficient in English. Lemmer and

Manyike (2014:256) emphasise the importance of learning in the child's home language as they believe it "empowers learners both academically and culturally to become lifelong learners and productive members of society". The National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU National Report 2013:9) acknowledges the fact that many children learn in a second language, and that an African language is not offered in many schools. The NEEDU believe that the problem will be alleviated when a new policy (The Incremental Introduction of African Languages Policy) is introduced, making it compulsory to learn an African language in all schools from Grade 1 (DBE nd.).

It is evident that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the South African Schools Act and the Language in Education Policy are all designed to work together to promote equal access to education, void of any discrimination based on race, culture or language, to name a few.

A review of the national Curriculum will help to understand how it contributes to the promotion of equal unbiased education for all learners.

### **3.3 CURRICULUM CHANGES SINCE 1994**

#### **3.3.1 Overview of Curriculum 2005 and its revision**

Democracy saw numerous changes taking place in education. A single national Department of Education (DE) with integrated provincial departments was created. This included education departments that were from the previously so-called 'homelands'. The new education department had the important task of establishing a single curriculum for all South Africans. This resulted in Curriculum 2005 (C2005) (Prinsloo & Janks 2002:20, 29).

Curriculum 2005 (C2005) was developed to serve a newly democratic nation. It was based on the principles of Outcome Based Education (OBE). C2005 was approved on 29 September 1997 and implemented in 1998. C2005 had several roles to fulfil, including to promote the new constitution, to rebuild a divided nation, to unite a divided education sector, to promote inclusivity and to ensure equal education for all the citizens of South Africa (DoE 2009:11-12).

OBE had at its core the hope that all children (learners) would achieve to their maximum ability. This would happen by setting outcomes to be attained at the end of the learning process. These outcomes promoted a learner-centred and activity-based approach to education (DoE 2002:1). A strong emphasis was placed on learning by discovery and group-work. This was a clear move away from Christian National Education to a rights-based education that favoured, “learner-centredness” (DoE 2009:12).

This new curriculum used a different terminology to describe, among others, languages. Languages were referred to as “main languages” and “additional languages”. The new terminology sought to bridge the belief that a “second-language” (as it was previously called) implied “second-class” (Murray 2012:88).

Although the National Curriculum Statement, General Education and Training: Assessment Guidelines for the Foundation Phase Grades R-3 (DoE nd.) gave many exemplars on how to plan for assessment, it was a difficult document to fully understand. There were so many learning outcomes (LO) and assessment standards (AS) that needed to be achieved that it became overwhelming for many teachers. Added to this was the complex terminology used, which left many teachers feeling confused (Singh 2010:119).

By early 2000, flaws in C2005 became evident. The major causes for concern were the complaints about the learners’ inability to read, write and count at appropriate grade levels (DoE 2009:12). Wolhuter (2011:280) suggested that for OBE to work successfully there exists, among others, the need for the learners to be proficient in the LoLT. Many learners were being taught in a language other than their home language. Prof. Kadar Asmal, the then Minister of Education, set up a review committee to investigate and suggest changes to the curriculum (DoE 2009:12). The result of this review was the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), which was implemented in January 2004.

The RNCS was a simplified and clearer Curriculum 2005 (DoE 2009:13). It had a clear image of the kind of “learner” that was to emanate from this curriculum. “The curriculum seeks to create a lifelong learner who is confident and independent, literate, numerate, multi-skilled, compassionate, with respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as a critical and active citizen” (DoE 2002:3).

The RNCS supported and promoted the additive approach to multilingualism that was promulgated by the LiEP and the Constitution (DoE 2002:4). It stated, among others that, “All learners should learn their home language and at least one additional official language. Learners become competent in their additional language, while their home language is maintained and developed” (DoE 2002:4). The use of a learner’s home language as the LoLT was encouraged as far as possible, with the particular emphasis on the Foundation Phase. The RNCS further specified that where the LoLT was an additional language for the learner, the teachers, alongside any specialist educators, should offer “special assistance and supplementary learning” of the additional language until the learner was proficient enough in the LoLT to be able to learn effectively and more independently (DoE 2002:5).

The RNCS Languages – English Home Language (Grades R-9) (DoE 2002:9) advocated a balanced approach to literacy development. It involved the learners reading real (published) books and writing for genuine (authentic) purpose, with an added emphasis on phonics. Six learning outcomes (listening, speaking, reading and viewing, writing, thinking and reasoning and language structure and use) were to work together to develop a learner’s language.

Although there was more clarity in terms of the learning outcomes than had been in the C2005, the RNCS had its problems. The teachers read different documents (published by the Department of Education) and noted contradictions across them. The GET Languages National Curriculum Statement document suggested a balanced approach to language learning. However, the Learning Programme Guideline advocated a “whole language” or communicative approach (DoE 2009:19). The Language Policy specified in the RNCS was also not clearly communicated and implemented. This resulted in many children only learning English in Grade 3, leaving them unprepared for the change in the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in Grade 4 (DoE 2009:14).

In July 2009 the then Minister of Basic Education, Minister A. Motshekga, appointed a panel of experts to investigate the challenges experienced with the National Curriculum Statement (Wolhuter 2011:283). The reviews resulted in a curriculum implemented in 2012, called the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 (DBE 2011b:3). The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 replaces the Subject Statements, Learning Programme Guidelines and subject Assessment Guidelines with:

- the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for all approved subjects
- National policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12
- National Protocol for Assessment Grades R-12.

A more in-depth look at the CAPS English Home Language Grades R-3 policy document (DBE 2011b) will be undertaken in order to fully understand it.

### **3.4 THE CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICY STATEMENT (CAPS)**

In the foreword to the CAPS English Home Language Grades R-3 policy document (DBE 2011b), Min. Angie Motshekga stated, “From 2012 the two 2002 curricula, for Grades R-9 and Grades 10-12 respectively, are combined in a single document and will be simply known as the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12.” She further indicated that the CAPS builds on and updates the previous curriculum. It aims to provide clear direction on what is to be taught and learnt each term.

The principles upon which the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 (DBE 2011b:4-5) are based include the following:

- Social transformation: Addressing and correcting the educational inequalities of the past and affording all citizens equal educational opportunities.
- Providing a platform for active and critical learning to take place as opposed to merely learning in a rote fashion and not engaging critically with the subject matter, the content or the text.
- High knowledge and high skills are specified (minimum standards) for each subject and are to be achieved by the end of each grade.
- Human rights, social justice and inclusivity are promoted as mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.
- Sensitivity towards poverty, inequality, race, gender, language, age, disability and other factors are accounted for and carefully considered.



The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 (DBE 2011b:5) also has a clear image of the learner it wishes to produce. This vision includes learners who are able to “communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes”. The emphasis is on inclusivity, catering for diversity and which encourages the teachers to identify the barriers to learning and to plan the necessary support from various support structures. This includes support from the teacher, Institutional-level Support Teams, District-based Support Teams, the parents and Special Schools as Resource Centres. The teachers are also urged to differentiate the curriculum in order to address the barriers to learning in the classroom (see chapter 2: 2.5.3.1).

The CAPS (DBE 2011b) Home Language – English Policy determines the skills in the Home Language curriculum as listening and speaking, reading and phonics, writing and handwriting. Reasoning and language structure and use are integrated into all four the language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). The knowledge, concepts and skills in the NCS have been neatly organized in the aforementioned CAPS (DBE 2011b:8) document under the following headings:

- an introduction containing guidelines on how to use the Foundation Phase document;
- the content, concepts and skills to be taught per term;
- guidelines for time-allocation;
- requirements for the Formal Assessment Activities and suggestions for informal assessment;
- lists of recommended resources per grade.

It is evident from the aforementioned points that the CAPS document provided greater clarity on what needed to be taught and assessed per term than the previous RNCS or C2005 documents. With the implementation of the CAPS in 2012 was the introduction of an additional language from Grade 1 (Howie et al. 2012:12).

### **3.4.1 The instruction of language in the Foundation Phase according to the CAPS**

The CAPS policy states that an integrated approach will be used as the “language programme is integrated into all other subject areas”. These include Mathematics and Life Skills in the

Foundation Phase (DBE 2011b:8-9). Language is used across the curriculum; so language is not merely taught and acquired during an English lesson, but rather, it is constantly being used as a teaching and learning tool throughout all the subject areas. The learners listen, question, make notes, read and complete assessment tasks, thereby using and integrating many language skills throughout the day. The Manual for Teaching English across the Curriculum (DBE 2013b) aims at improving the teaching of English as subject, as well as English as a LoLT (DBE 2013b:7-9).

The CAPS Home Language (English) (DBE 2011b:8) recommends the minimum and maximum times for teaching language. They are as follows:

- Grade R – 10 hours per week; and
- Grade 1 to 3 – (7) 8 hours per week.

Although the Department (DBE 2011b:9-10) does not stipulate how the minimum or maximum times should be divided into various aspects of language teaching, it does suggest the following in the Foundation Phase from Grade 1 to Grade 3:

## Grade 1: Home language

	<b>Minimum time per day</b>	<b>Total: Minimum per week</b>	<b>Maximum time per day</b>	<b>Total: Maximum per week</b>
<b>Listening/Speaking</b>	15 minutes per day for 3 days	45 minutes	15 minutes per day for 4 days	1 hour
<b>Reading and Phonics</b>	<b>Phonics:</b> 15 minutes per day for 5 days  <b>Shared Reading:</b> 15 minutes per day for 3 days  <b>Group Reading:</b> 30 minutes per day for (2 groups each for 15 minutes) for 5 days	1 hour 15 minutes  45 minutes  2 hours 30 minutes	15 minutes per day for 5 days  <b>Shared Reading/ Shared Writing:</b> 15 minutes per day for 5 days 30 minutes per day (2 groups each for 15 minutes) for 5 days	1 hour 15 minutes  1 hour 15 minutes  2 hours 30 minutes
<b>Handwriting</b>	15 minutes per day for 4 days	1 hour	15 minutes per day for 4 days	1 hour
<b>Writing</b>	15 minutes per day for 3 days	45 minutes	20 minutes per day for 3 days	1 hour
<b>Total per week</b>		7 hours		8 hours

## Grade 2: Home language

	Minimum time per day	Total: Minimum per week	Maximum time per day	Total: Maximum per week
<b>Listening/Speaking</b>	15 minutes per day for 3 days	45 minutes	15 minutes per day for 4 days	1 hour
<b>Reading and Phonics</b>	<b>Phonics:</b> 15 minutes per day for 5 days  <b>Shared Reading:</b> 20 minutes per day for 3 days  <b>Group Reading:</b> 30 minutes per day for (2 groups each for 15 minutes) for 5 days	1 hour [sic]  1 hour  2 hours 30 minutes	15 minutes per day for 5 days  <b>Shared Reading/ Shared Writing:</b> 15 minutes per day for 5 days 30 minutes per day (2 groups each for 15 minutes) for 5 days	1 hour 15 minutes  1 hour 15 minutes  2 hours 30 minutes
<b>Handwriting</b>	15 minutes per day for 3 days	45 minutes	15 minutes per day for 4 days	1 hour
<b>Writing</b>	15 minutes per day for 4 days	1 hour	20 minutes per day for 3 days	1 hour
<b>Total per week</b>		7 hours		8 hours

### Grade 3: Home language

	<b>Minimum time per day</b>	<b>Total: Minimum per week</b>	<b>Maximum time per day</b>	<b>Total: Maximum per week</b>
<b>Listening/Speaking</b>	15 minutes per day for 3 days	45 minutes	15 minutes per day for 4 days	1 hour
<b>Reading and Phonics</b>	<b>Phonics:</b> 15 minutes per day for 4 days  <b>Shared Reading:</b> 20 minutes per day for 3 days  <b>Group Reading:</b> 30 minutes per day for (2 groups each for 15 minutes) for 5 days	1 hour  1 hour  2 hours 30 minutes	15 minutes per day for 5 days  <b>Shared Reading/ Shared Writing:</b> 15 minutes per day for 5 days 30 minutes per day (2 groups each for 15 minutes) for 5 days	1 hour 15 minutes  1 hour 15 minutes  2 hours 30 minutes
<b>Handwriting</b>	15 minutes per day for 3 days	45 minutes	15 minutes per day for 4 days	1 hour
<b>Writing</b>	20 minutes per day for 3 days	1 hour	20 minutes per day for 3 days	1 hour
<b>Total per week</b>		7 hours		8 hours

The CAPS (DBE 2011b:10) goes on to provide the requirements for each Formal Assessment Activity in the Home Language. Grade 1 and Grade 2 are required to conduct 7 assessments a year (one in term 1, two in each of the remainder terms), and Grade 3 is required to do 9 (one in term 1, three in terms two and three, two in term 4). The schools are also encouraged to conduct baseline assessments in the first term to determine what the learners know. Informal assessments are also to be conducted throughout the year but these will not be formally recorded.

The CAPS (DBE: 2011b) HL English document further provides clear definitions of what each of the aforementioned skills are and how they should be taught to the learners in the Foundation Phase. These skills will be discussed (cf. 3.4.1.1 & 3.4.1.2) to gain clarity on

what is expected from teachers when teaching English Home Language in the Foundation Phase.

The CAPS (DBE 2011b:10-14, 18-19) HL document explains the skills and considerations to make when teaching as follows:

### **3.4.1.1 Listening and speaking**

The emphasis is on ensuring that all the learners develop listening and speaking skills across the curriculum from an early age and not just in language, as mentioned previously. The time allocated for listening and speaking ensures that this important aspect of learning is accommodated, both at the beginning of the day and during focused time for specific listening and speaking activities. Oral work at the beginning of each day will include discussing the weather, events of the day (birthdays, shows, etc.), checking attendance and sharing news or topics of interest. Focused activities should be planned for a minimum of twice a week. It is recommended that the focused activities should be incorporated into Drama which is part of Creative Arts in Life Skills. (The focused listening and speaking skills will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter - see chapter 3: 3.5.1.1 – 3.5.1.4).

### **3.4.1.2 Reading and writing focus time**

In Grades 1-3 reading and writing should be done during Reading and Writing Focus Time. The teachers are to use this time to teach the learners to become efficient readers and writers. The daily lessons must be planned to include Shared Reading and Writing, Group-guided Reading, Paired and Independent Reading, Phonics, Group and Individual Writing, grammar and spelling activities (DBE 2011b:11-14, 18, 19):

- Shared Reading – The teacher works with the entire class, using a single enlarged text, such as Big Books, and pictures, or an individual fiction or non-fiction text for each child. The texts to be used will increase in complexity and length with each grade. The learners are introduced to a variety of poems, stories, rhymes and plays, as well as information and graphical texts. Each Shared Reading lesson (referred to as a ‘session’) will incorporate an aspect from the following: the concepts of print, defined by McLachlan et al. (2013:29) as reading from left-right;

front-back, identifying the book cover, author and text, phonics, language patterns, word identification strategies and comprehension, which includes literal, reorganization, inferential, evaluation and appreciation questions. The sessions are also to be divided over several days, depending on the grade and the learners' needs. Session 1 involves an introduction to the text that is both enjoyable and interactive. The learners are encouraged to give their personal response to the text. During the second reading of the text the teacher uses the discussions emanating from the text to develop vocabulary and comprehension, to decode skills and text structures, such as grammar and punctuation, to name a few. During the third (and possibly the fourth) session, the learners are encouraged to read the text independently and engage in oral, practical and written activities relevant to the text.

- Shared Writing - Where possible the Shared Reading text should inform the Shared Writing, with the teacher modeling how to write a text. The learners actively participate in the composition of the text with the teacher as the facilitator and scribe. The Shared Reading text will provide multiple examples to incorporate, among others, language patterns and spelling choices. This modeling of the writing process will help to train the learners to do their own writing tasks later on.
- Group, Guided Reading – Every day the learners read from the same text in ability-groups of 6-10 children, according to their reading level, under the guidance of the teacher. The texts that are chosen are to be at the group's instructional level of reading. The 'instructional level of reading' means that the reader should be able to recognize and decode between 90%-95% (some authors suggest between 95%-98%) of the words, and should comprehend the text without too much difficulty (Dednam 2005:133). During this time the learners are taught reading strategies, such as a variety of 'word-attack' strategies to apply when they face difficult texts. The learners, both with each other and with the teacher, engage in dialogue about the text, referred to as 'text talk'.

When introducing a text to the group, the teacher must ensure that she has pre-read the text to identify any problematic vocabulary or syntax. The text must be introduced (type of book or chapter) and the topic identified. The learners can survey the captions, headings, tables and any other information that may be useful in understanding the text. The learners must be

encouraged to make personal connections with the topic in the text and relate it to their own life experiences.

During the first independent reading, the teacher has to observe the learners' reading behavior. The teacher must listen to each learner reading a small section of the text aloud. He/she then asks questions about the text to determine the learners' understanding. This time is used by the teacher in order to help to improve each learner's reading ability by offering the specific and individual support he or she may require. The learners are then encouraged to later re-read the text in pairs or alone. This repeated reading affords the learners the opportunity to build their fluency, to develop their vocabulary and grammar, and for a deeper comprehension.

- Paired and Independent Reading – The essence of this activity is to provide the learners with practice and to encourage reading for enjoyment. The learners can either re-read their group-reading book or choose a supplementary book. The text should be at a lower level than in the Shared and Group Guided Reading. The learners can sit in pairs and take turns to read to each other, or together.
- Writing – The CAPS English Home Language document (DBE 2011b:19) advocates the 'process approach' to writing. This includes encouraging the learners to draft, write and edit their work before publishing (and presenting) the text for others to read and enjoy. In the Foundation Phase the learners do not re-write their work after it has been edited, but rather edit it themselves by drawing a line through the unwanted words or adding text if necessary.

At the beginning of Grade 1 the learners 'write' by using pictures, and progress to copying individual words, captions or sentences that they illustrate. By the middle of Grade 1 the learners should be able to write their own captions for their pictures and to construct a sentence. The teachers can scaffold (assist and guide) the writing process by providing sentence starters or frames, e.g., 'During the holiday I ...' Each learner should be given an A5 book to use as a personal dictionary. Use 'cloze procedure' exercises which require from the learners to complete a sentence so that it makes sense by adding a word to enhance the writing. The learners may also be asked questions which require a 'yes/no' answer, or a single word.



Shared Writing activities model the writing process, allowing the learners to understand how individual letters form a word and how these words combine to form sentences, as well as the importance of spacing between words and the use of punctuation. Shared Writing extends the learners' vocabulary. They start to understand how to enrich sentences by adding interesting parts of speech (verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc.). The learners' writing of sentences should improve and progress to the extent that paragraph writing can be introduced.

- Handwriting – The CAPS English Home Language document (DBE 2011b:19) makes provision for the systematic teaching of the skills of handwriting, in short lessons in the Foundation Phase for approximately 15 minutes per day.

Pre-writing programme – A pre-writing programme should establish, among others, fine and gross motor skills. The learners must be taught the correct pencil grip and how to properly form letters. They should also be encouraged to sit correctly. As many young learners battle to copy correctly from a board, it is recommended that they initially be given writing strips to copy from during Handwriting.

By the end of Grade 1 the learners should be able to correctly form all the upper and lower case letters, as well as be able to copy sentences from sentence strips and from the board. In Grade 2 the learners progress towards writing with more speed and start learning a joined script or cursive writing. Although the choice of handwriting script is determined by the school and the province, it is still mandated that the learners be taught to write a form of joined script or cursive writing by the end of Grade 3.

The writing materials should initially consist of blank paper and wax crayons for Grade 1, with the aim of progressing towards writing on 17 mm. lines using pencils for formal handwriting lessons. Blank jotters may be used in Grades 1 and 2 for other written work, but by Grade 3 the learners should be working in 8,5 mm. lined books.

The DBE (2011b:10-19) indicated very clear and specific requirements for the teaching of English Home Language in the Foundation Phase. The document 'breaks down' the teaching of reading into the following five components: phonemic awareness, word recognition (sight words and phonics), comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. Each of these components have been discussed in depth in Chapter 2, thus no further review will be undertaken. The

CAPS English Home Language document (DBE 2011b: 14-18) supports all the research mentioned in the previous chapter regarding the five components of reading, and also advocates teaching these components explicitly and on a daily basis. The one area that requires special mention is that of phonics.

The CAPS English Home Language document (DBE 2011b:15) states that the schools may select a phonic programme, but they have to support the programme explicitly while systematically teaching phonics throughout the school. The suggested sequence of introducing phonics in the CAPS document is only a guide, and the schools should follow the sequence of the phonic elements of their selected programme. Phonics and handwriting have to be linked, as the teaching of the letter/sound correspondence and how to write them are interwoven.

### **3.5 EARLY READING**

Although children in South Africa formally start learning to read in Grade 1, the foundation for reading starts earlier (Gillet et al. 2012:13).

A brief review will be done of how the foundation for reading is laid before Grade 1. Following this will be a discussion of initial reading instruction according to the Grade 1 curriculum.

The CAPS (DBE 2011b:18) English Home Language document recommends that the teachers read and gain more information on reading instruction from the DBE's reading textbook entitled 'Teaching Reading in the Early Grades' (DBE 2008). This textbook (2008:8-11) supports the notion that reading occurs in stages according to the development of the individual learner. The first three stages described in the textbook are as follows:

The pre-reader (stage 1) is able to:

- hold books and turn pages correctly;
- recognise the beginning and end of the book;
- listen and respond to stories;

- interpret pictures;
- pretend to read;
- know some letters;
- show an interest in print when they see it in the world around them.

The emergent reader (stage 2):

- uses pictures to tell stories;
- knows some letter/sound correspondences;
- knows that print goes from left to right and top to bottom;
- joins in with the teacher or reader when reading familiar books;
- recognises some words, e.g. their names;
- reads some print in the environment;
- reads familiar books with word patterns.

The early reader (stage 3):

- knows most letter sounds and names;
- recognises common words;
- can retell an age-appropriate story;
- uses pictures to make meaning;
- can read 70% of the words correctly in a familiar text at their level;
- reads aloud when reading to the self;
- still reads word for word – not yet fluent;
- reads early readers and picture books with pattern, repetition and rhyme in Home Language and Additional Languages.

The CAPS English Home Language document (DBE 2011b:23-30) goes on to give an overview of the Language Skills to be taught in the Home Language in Grade R. Included in these are a number of the emergent skills previously mentioned. The Grade R curriculum (CAPS) (DBE 2011b:23-30) focuses on preparing the learners to become readers by providing many opportunities for them to, among others:

- listen to stories and poems;
- ‘read’ enlarged texts such as poems, Big Books, posters;
- discuss stories, poems and posters;
- describe characters in stories and give opinions;
- make predictions during a story (through the pictures);
- answer questions based on the story read;
- identify rhyming words in well-known nursery rhymes;
- identify that words are made up of speech sounds (phonemic awareness);
- segment aural sentences into individual words;
- divide multisyllabic words into syllables;
- recognise aurally and visually some initial consonants and vowels, especially at the beginning of a word;
- read high frequency words in the classroom, e.g., ‘door’;
- sing simple songs;
- arrange a set of pictures to form a story;
- use pictures to interpret and make up their own stories;
- act out parts of a story, song or rhyme;
- pretend to read, holding the book the correct way up.

During Grade R the focus is on informal and spontaneous learning. The learners should be exposed to a “balanced, flexible language rich daily programme” (DBE 2011b:20-21). During the day there should be many opportunities to develop phonemic awareness (e.g., ‘I Spy game’, allowing the children to go to the toilet first if their name begins with a particular sound), engage in ‘story time’ (shared reading), and use any “teachable moments” to enhance literacy (DBE 2011b:20).

### **3.5.1 Initial (beginner) reading instruction in the Grade 1 curriculum**

Once the children enter Grade 1, formal reading instruction begins. Reading programmes used in schools in South Africa include, New Way (Easy Start), Ginn Reading 360, Rainbow Reading and Literacy for All. The CAPS document for English Home Language (DBE 2011b) has clear and specific requirements of what should be taught and learnt each term. Although reading is the focus of this study, it is important to include the concepts and skills

of listening and speaking that are developed throughout Grade 1, as they often coincide with and are integral to reading, as discussed in Chapter 2 (2.4.1.4).

### **3.5.1.1 Term 1**

According to the DBE (2011b:55-57), during Term 1 Grade 1 reading and phonics focus on daily phonemic awareness/phonic activities. One to two new letters should be introduced every week, allowing for words to be built with these sounds. The phonemic awareness/phonic activities include:

- many opportunities to blend sounds (c/a/t =cat), to segment words (cat=c/a/t/), and to substitute consonants and vowels in words to create new words, e.g., replace the /h/ in /hat/ with /b/ to create /bat/;
- teaching the learners to identify the letter/sound relationship of at least two vowels and six consonants;
- recognising and naming some letters of the alphabet, namely two vowels and at least six consonants;
- building short words using the sounds learnt;
- beginning to use blending to make words e.g. /at/, /c/at/; /m/at/, and identifying the rhymes;
- distinguishing aurally between different initial sounds of words.

During Group Guided Reading, many of the previously mentioned emergent reading skills (holding the book the right way up, using pictures to predict the outcome of the story, reading picture books, listening to stories, etc.) are revised and reinforced during term 1. These skills and more are taught during the Shared and Group Guided Reading lessons. The learners are also encouraged to recognise their own names and those of at least ten peers. The classroom should include labels and captions for the learners to read. The teacher can start to point out capital letters, lowercase letters, full stops, commas and question marks when reading. During Group Guided Reading the learners must be encouraged to read aloud from a group reader which has text that matches the learners' instructional level (word recognition between 90%-95% accuracy). The learners should begin to build a sight vocabulary from incidental reading, graded reading and high frequency word lists.

Shared Reading is a teacher-modelled process with the whole class using enlarged texts, including poems, posters, ‘big books’ and class stories produced during the Shared Writing lessons. During Shared Reading the teacher should focus the learning on one of the following, namely concepts of print, text features, phonics, language patterns, word identification strategies, and comprehension.

Listening and speaking activities should take place in all areas of language and other subjects (DBE 2011b: 55). Daily/Weekly activities may include:

- listening without interrupting;
- talking about personal experiences, e.g., telling the news, the weather or other topical events;
- singing songs and doing the actions.

Focused listening and speaking activities from week one to week five include:

- listening to simple instructions and responding in the appropriate manner, e.g., classroom routines;
- listening to stories, rhymes, poems and songs with interest, and acting out part of the story, song or rhyme;
- answering questions, e.g., questions related to personal details.

Focused listening and speaking activities from week six to week ten may include:

- sequencing pictures of a story and retelling the sequence;
- talking about pictures in posters, theme charts, books, etc.;
- participating in discussions, including taking turns to speak and showing respect for others in the group;
- describing the characteristics of objects, using the correct vocabulary, e.g., colour, size, shape and quantity.

### 3.5.1.2 Term 2

According to the DBE (2011b:61, 63-64), during Term 2, Grade 1, reading and phonics continue to build on phonemic awareness while more new sounds are being introduced. Three vowels and thirteen consonants should have been learnt by the end of Term 2. The phonemic awareness activities used in Term 1 continue in Term 2, e.g., blending, segmenting, vowel/consonant substitution, and building-up words using the sounds learnt, etc. New concepts and skills include:

- distinguishing aurally between different beginning and end sounds of words;
- building up and breaking down simple words, beginning with a single consonant into onset (initial sound) and rime (the last part of the syllable), e.g., h-en, and identifying the rhymes;
- reading phonic words in sentences and other texts.

During Group Guided Reading and Shared Reading the teacher has to model decoding skills and other strategies, including contextual clues and structural analysis. The learners must be taught the “Five Finger Strategy” to apply when they meet unknown words. The “Teaching Reading in the Early Years” Handbook (DBE 2008:25) explains the strategy as follows:

- thumb - leave the word out and read to the end of the sentence;
- first finger – look at the pictures and headings;
- second finger – ask yourself if there are any parts of the word that you recognise;
- third finger – sound the word out;
- little finger – ask your teacher what the word means.

During Shared Reading in the second term the teacher must continue to read enlarged texts with the whole class. Other activities include, namely

- continuing to read enlarged texts;
- using pictures to predict what the story is about;
- interpreting pictures to make up your own story;
- using clues and pictures in the text to gain understanding;

- discussing the story and identifying the main idea and the main characters;
- answering a variety of questions based on the text read, including high-order type questions;
- discussing the use of capital letters and full stops.

Group Guided Reading continues with the learners reading in groups that suit their level of reading. The teacher should teach the learners how to monitor themselves when reading regarding word recognition and comprehension. The teacher models the process and asks herself questions such as, “Does it sound right?” “Does it look right?” “Does it make sense?” The learners continue to read aloud during Group Guided Reading. They should be encouraged to use phonics, context clues and sight words when reading. They continue to build a sight vocabulary.

Paired and Independent Reading is introduced. The texts selected should be at the independent reading level of the learner with more than 95% word-recognition accuracy. During this time the learners read to a partner from prepared or known texts to help to develop fluency.

Daily/Weekly listening and speaking activities in all areas of language and other subjects include many of the first term’s activities, and a few new activities are introduced. The activities can be described as follows:

- the learners must be encouraged to join in choruses of songs, stories and rhymes;
- recite poems and rhymes and do the actions;
- the learners must be given many opportunities to identify the part from the whole, e.g., the parts of a plant.

Focused listening and speaking activities from week one to five should include:

- continuing to listen to instructions and responding appropriately;
- passing on messages;
- listening to stories with interest, drawing a picture to show understanding;
- answering closed- and open-ended questions.



Listening and speaking activities from week six to ten involve:

- describing objects according to age, direction and sequence, using the correct vocabulary;
- identifying the main idea of a story;
- sequencing the pictures of a story;
- participating in classroom discussions;
- asking questions related to the stories told and read;
- understanding and using the appropriate language of the different subjects.

### **3.5.1.3 Term 3**

According to the DBE (2011b:68-69), during Term 3, Grade 1, reading and phonics skills that are revised and further developed include, namely to

- revise word families using the short vowel sounds learnt;
- identify letter/sound relationships of all single letters;
- build three-letter words using all single letters;
- use consonant blends to build up and break down words, e.g., bl/ack; fl/op;
- recognise common consonant digraphs at the beginning of a word, e.g., sh/ch/th/;
- group common words into sound families;
- read phonic words in sentences and other texts.

During Shared Reading the teacher continues to model good reading strategies with the learners. The learners are encouraged to use the “Five Finger Strategy” in all areas of reading. The teacher continues to read ‘big’ books and enlarged text to the whole class. Other activities include:

- making the learners aware of the sequence of events and the setting of the story;
- the teacher demonstrating how the cover of the book can be used to predict the storyline and the ending;
- the learners being shown how to recognise the cause and effect in a story;
- high order questions being asked based on the text read;

- the learners being prompted to give their own opinion on what was read;
- the learners being guided to interpret information from posters, pictures and simple tables, e.g. the calendar.

During Group Guided Reading the learners

- read aloud from their own books with the teacher;
- use phonics, context clues, structural analysis and sight words when reading;
- read with increased fluency and expression;
- continue to build a sight vocabulary from incidental reading, graded reading and high frequency word lists.

During Paired/ Independent Reading the children

- read aloud to a partner;
- read their own and others' writing;
- read books read in the Shared Reading sessions and books from the classroom reading corner.

The daily/weekly listening and speaking skills mentioned in term 1 and term 2 in all areas of language and other subjects are revised and continued in term 3. The focused listening and speaking skills continue to progress in weeks one to five with new activities, including

- listening to a story with interest and enjoyment, drawing a picture and also writing a caption for it;
- sequencing pictures of a story and matching captions with the pictures;
- role-playing different situations while using appropriate language.

During weeks six to ten the learners continue to improve on their listening and speaking skills. The teacher should encourage and provide many opportunities for the learners to

- answer open-ended questions when listening to stories;
- identify similarities and differences using the correct vocabulary;

- use their growing vocabulary when speaking.

#### **3.5.1.4 Term 4**

According to the DBE (2011b:74-76) during Term 4, Grade 1, some phonic activities from the previous terms (1-3) are continued and new activities are introduced to further develop the learners' reading abilities. These include:

- the revision of common consonant digraphs (sh, ch and th) at the beginning of a word, e.g., sh/ip, ch/in, th/in;
- recognising common consonant digraphs at the end of a word (sh, ch and th), e.g., fi/sh, mu/ch, wi/th;
- continuing to use consonant blends to build up and break down words, e.g., sp/o/t, fr/o/g;
- building words using the sounds learnt;
- continuing to group common words into sound families;
- continuing to read phonic words in sentences and other texts;
- learning to spell ten words a week taken from the phonics lessons.

During Shared Reading the learners continue to read 'big' books and enlarged texts with the teacher. Some of the previous processes modelled are revised and continued. These include:

- using the cover of the book to predict what the story is about;
- identifying the sequence of events in what was read;
- recognising cause and effect in a story;
- interpreting the information on posters;
- using clues and pictures in the book for understanding.

Additional teacher-modelled processes are introduced. These can be described as follows:

- identify the initial problem in a story that sets the story in motion;
- answer open-ended questions based on the passage read.

Group Guided Reading continues to progress with the goal of the learners being able to monitor their self-reading, including word recognition and comprehension. The learners should also progress towards being able to show an understanding of punctuation when reading aloud.

During Paired/Independent Reading the learners must be encouraged to continue reading their own writing but to also start correcting their errors. The learners must be supported to continue reading books during the Shared Reading sessions and to read books from the classroom reading corner.

During listening and speaking activities in all areas of language and other subjects, in the last term of Grade 1, all of the skills mentioned in the previous three terms are consolidated and revised, with the addition of introducing the learners to and encouraging them to use terms such as ‘sentence’, ‘capital letter’ and ‘full stop’. The focused listening and speaking skills from week one to week five continue to progress and include,

- the learners using language imaginatively;
- listening to discussions and reporting back on behalf of the group;
- using simple strategies for gathering data (information), e.g., conducting a survey on how many learners come to school;
- classifying information, e.g. by using loose pictures.

The focused listening and speaking activities from weeks six to ten include a revision of some of the activities from the first three terms (listening to instructions and announcements, answering closed- and open-ended questions), and further includes

- telling a familiar story with a clear beginning, middle and end, varying the tone and volume of the voice.

A thorough review of the NCS CAPS English Home Language (DBE 2011b) has clearly indicated how reading instruction in Grade 1 should be undertaken. The CAPS document is more prescriptive than the previous documents and strives to ensure that the schools throughout South Africa cover the same skills and concepts per term. Workbooks are also

provided to reinforce concepts and skills (Reyneke 2014:32). The document clearly advocates the notion of the teacher as the one who guides and helps the learners towards reading throughout Grade 1. The DBE (2011d:9) reiterates scaffolding to help all the learners to achieve academically. The aim of the reading policy in the CAPS is to help the learners to ultimately become critical and creative thinkers (Howie et al. 2012:17). The five main areas of reading instruction mentioned (phonemic awareness, listening and speaking etc.) are included in the CAPS document and are well-supported internationally, as reviewed in Chapter 2.

### **3.6 CHALLENGES RELATED TO INITIAL READING INSTRUCTION IN GRADE 1 WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

The DBE (2011b) clearly indicates what has to be taught every term and the activities that may be included when teaching young learners to read. Although the document is comprehensive there are still many challenges that both the teachers and the learners have to face in the classroom. Some of the challenges include under-resourced, poorly-equipped reading corners and libraries (Howie et al. 2012:114, 116)

#### **3.6.1 Language and learning to read**

One of the other challenges that readers in South Africa have to face is learning in an additional language (usually English) and not in their home language (Hugo & Nieman 2010:60; Lessing & Mahabeer 2007:139). The implication of learning in an additional language is learning to read in an additional language (Le Cordeur 2010:80). Lessing and Mahabeer (2007:140) assert that learning in an additional language may result in the learners struggling to acquire reading and writing skills. Learners who are taught to read in their home language first are able to transfer the acquired reading skills to the additional language (Mbatha 2014:39; Nel 2005:152). Having phonological awareness in a familiar home language (such as isiZulu) provides a better foundation when learning the sounds of an additional language, particularly English (Mbatha 2014:44). (Refer to Chapter 2: 2.5.3 for reading instructions that cater for ESL learners.)

The DBE (2013d:31) acknowledges that although they recommend learners should learn in their home language, many parents opt to place their children in schools where English is the

language of instruction. Churr (2013:275) postulates that many parents want their children to be instructed in English as they believe it will, among others, better prepare their children to enter the world of work, especially in the international arena. Mbatha (2014:45) states that some teachers do not see the value of learning in the home language and echo the parents' call for instruction in English. However, the reality is that learning and learning to read in an additional language places the learner at a greater risk of developing barriers to learning in literacy (Van Staden 2011:10; Reyneke 2014:33).

The importance of a learner's home language cannot be stressed enough. Peregoy and Boyle (2013:73) agree that the child's home language is very important, as the strength of his/her home language plays a crucial role in acquiring the additional language. They state, "Primary language development serves as a resource for English language development, cognitively, linguistically and socially" (ibid). Trumbell and Pacheco (2005:57) support this notion. Nel (2005:151) indicates that learners who are thoroughly exposed to and saturated in their home language build a stronger foundation to acquire the additional language. Nel believes that it can be detrimental to a learner's speaking, reading and writing development in an additional language if he or she is required to speak English too early.

Cummins (2008:72) BICS and CALP, discussed in Chapter 2 (2.5.2), explain the complexity of learning in an additional language, and how learners are misplaced in special education programmes simply because their CALP did not develop and progress as their BICS did. If one of the main goals of education is to develop an academic language so that the learners may, "engage meaningfully with the subject matter across the curriculum at all stages of the process" then a closer look at language teaching practices and policies is needed in the Foundation Phase where formal learning begins (Jordaan 2011:530). In her pilot study on ESL learners struggling with reading, Van Staden (2011:19) advocates more research is needed to understand how ESL learners learn to read and how teachers can help them.

### **3.6.2 Diverse classroom contexts in South Africa**

The diverse multi-cultural classrooms in South Africa indicate many different scenarios regarding language, learning and reading.

A discussion and explanation of some of the scenarios in South Africa are presented to better understand the realities of diverse classrooms.

### **3.6.2.1 The teachers' language proficiency in the additional languages**

A scenario relevant to many schools in South Africa is having ESL learners (e.g., isiZulu speaking) with a teacher whose home language is English providing instruction in English. The teacher does not share the same language or cultural background as the learners, making bilingual input during lessons impossible, thus further disadvantaging the ESL learners (Lessing & Mahabeer 2007:146). Hugo (2011:275) indicates that for some ESL learners, the first time they hear English is when they enter Grade 1. These learners battle to understand the teacher due to their limited English vocabulary which makes learning to read very difficult. It is a daunting task for these young learners to master a new language while also having to learn to read. Learning to read becomes even more problematic when the schools make use of 'foreign' readers (reading programmes, such as the Janet and John series that originate from Britain) (Hugo 2010:140). These readers include 'situations' (with pictures) that are completely unfamiliar to ESL learners (Hugo 2011:275). This context is converse to the findings that home language instruction is the best option for (reading) instruction.

Hugo (2008:73) stresses the importance of the teachers understanding how second language learning occurs and of the problems that ESL learners may face when learning to read as this will better equip the teachers to help ESL learners. Klapwijk (2012:201) agrees with Hugo and states that the teachers need support and training on how to accommodate learners in a multilingual classroom.

### **3.6.2.2 The teachers' language proficiency in English**

Although not generic to early reading instruction but noted as a significant challenge, was the discovery that many teachers use English as the medium of instruction even though it may be an additional (even third) language for them (Hugo & Nieman 2010:60). This practice is seen primarily in the Intermediate Phase where English becomes the LoLT for the vast majority of South African learners (Hugo & Nieman 2010:61). The teachers may not have an adequate command of or be competent in English, which directly influences their ability to teach, and this affects the learners' ability to comprehend what they are being taught

(Reyneke 2014:32; Hugo & Nieman 2010:60-61). Hugo and Nieman (2010:60) continue to explain that many teachers have the BICS (are able to communicate and speak in English) but their CALP (more complex language skills and academic language) is not sufficiently developed. The result is that the language used in the classroom contributes to creating barriers to learning and teaching.

Nel and Muller (2010:639) indicate that the errors made by teachers not proficient in English are being transferred to the learners. The errors noted include phonological errors (incorrect pronunciation, incorrect sound, stress and intonation patterns), the incorrect use of verb tenses and the incorrect use of gender (confusing 'he' and 'she'). Prinsloo (2011:6) supports Nel and Muller's findings and explains that many teachers do not have the necessary vocabulary to adequately explain concepts to their classes, resulting in errors such as, "...he doesn't won't have". Prinsloo supports the belief that only a few privileged children are exposed to good spoken and written English, while the majority of the children have access to only a sub-standard form of English. It is vital that the teachers are trained in the theory of second language teaching and are provided with support to attain "CALP status in English" (Hugo & Nieman 2010:66).

### **3.6.2.3 Parental support for home literacy**

Heugh (2009:97-98) presents another context unfolding in middle-class suburban schools, namely that of suburban African learners whose parents belong to the "black elite", who are wealthy and speak English as a home language, or are highly proficient in English. The children of these parents find it difficult to "imagine themselves with identities which include African languages". The African languages are spoken sparingly at these middle-class suburban schools, often within the context only of greetings, and away from the classrooms. The implication of this is that these learners start losing the ability to use the African language in anything other than a superficial manner. Dixon and Peake (2008:78) state that an unpleasant consequence of choosing English over the mother tongue or the complete loss of the mother tongue is the "exclusion from a range of social networks".

Singh (2010:125) mentions other challenges faced by many ESL learners in South Africa. These include learners whose parents do not have the time or who make very little effort to help their children with reading. The parents often cannot read English themselves and are



therefore unable to help their children to read. Illiterate grandparents with whom the learners may be living are also unable to help them with their reading. Also, the home environment may not consider reading or homework as important.

Pretorius and Mampuru (2007:40) indicate the effects of poverty on learning to read as some of the challenges being faced by many learners. Poverty includes the lack of resources such as books, an environment (classroom) that is not ‘print-rich’, and learners who come from impoverished families. Learners coming from ‘print-deprived’ backgrounds do not see the value of reading, which is often perpetuated by a poor culture of reading in the community (Scheepers 2008:33). The vital role the parents play and the importance of the parents providing access to activities at home that help to promote the development of reading cannot be overemphasized (Combrinck, Van Staden & Roux 2014:8).

Learners are at a disadvantage when they attend schools which are scarcely-resourced, with little or no books or libraries. Learners need to read to become good readers, and therefore they have to be surrounded by books in a ‘print-rich’ environment with exposure to a variety of texts. The analogy of playing football without a ball is as outrageous as learning to read without books (Pretorius & Mampuru 2007:41, 56).

### **3.7 CONCLUSION**

Careful consideration needs to be taken of all aspects when teaching ESL learners to read and write in an additional language. Once reading and writing difficulties start (without any learning support) the catastrophic result is often overall poor academic performance (Lessing & Mahabeer 2007:147). Although the LiEP advocates home language (mother tongue) instruction, it has not been easy to “translate the language policy into practice” (Mbatha 2014:38). School Governing Bodies who choose the LoLT, as well as the parents and teachers, need to ‘think again’ how they promote or denounce languages and with this in mind, the underlying message to learners that some languages are superior to others (Dixon & Peake 2008:88).

Although there exist many different classroom contexts throughout South Africa, the ultimate goal of teaching reading should be to help all the learners to read to the best of their abilities and with understanding so that they can indeed, engage critically with a variety of texts

throughout their lives. The CAPS document can guide the teachers, but ultimately it is the teachers who are responsible for the delivery of the curriculum; thus it is important that the teachers know how to teach reading effectively to diverse classes of learners.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Qualitative research is interactive research which entails the researcher spending a lot of time observing, interviewing and recording the processes as they occur naturally (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:340). It has at its core the goal of understanding social phenomena from the participants' perspectives (ibid.). Qualitative research provides great depth and insight into the intricate nature of teaching and learning in education (Cooley 2013:250).

This chapter serves to present the research design of the present qualitative study using classroom ethnography. A review of ethnography was conducted in order to understand the relevance it has for this study. The researcher's role and the selection of the school and the participants will be discussed, as well as the data-collection strategies and the analysis of the data. Finally, the ethical considerations relevant to this study will be indicated.

#### **4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

##### **4.2.1 Research approach: Ethnographic inquiry**

The term 'ethnography' was used a century ago by anthropologists to describe a new way of conducting research that involved working with and living amongst one's 'informants' to gain an insight into and an understanding of that particular culture (Mills & Morton 2013:3; Lichtman 2014:100-101). *Culture* (cf. chapter 2; 2.5.1) can be described as shared norms or characteristics specific to a group. A group can include individuals (e.g., two learners needing learning support) or small groups (e.g., academic departments), or larger groups (e.g., a school) or community (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:344). Educational researchers may make use of ethnography to study the cultures of a school or a community. The researchers may look carefully at what happens in the classroom (all the interactions that take place), and make a study of the contexts in which these interactions take place (Check & Schutt 2012:190). An *ethnographic qualitative study* can, therefore, be defined as an in-depth

study and interpretation of a specific culture or social group (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:343).

During ethnographic inquiry the researcher studies the chosen group in its natural setting for a length of time, which may extend to several weeks, months or years (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:139). The natural setting implies that there is no manipulation or control over behavior. Thus, the context in which the research takes place is not manipulated or staged (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:321). Ethnography typically includes observation and interviews (structured and casual) with the participants (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:26). (These aspects of ethnography will be discussed in section 4.3.3.2).

A *case study* can be defined as “an in-depth analysis of a single entity” (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:344). This “single entity” may include a specific individual, programme or event (e.g., a teacher, a class of children, a school, an academic programme) (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:137). Check and Schutt (2012:190) support these definitions and add that a case study involves understanding the entity in its entirety.

This ethnographic study seeks to understand how a class of Grade 1 learners learn to read in their natural classroom setting over several weeks. It includes an in-depth observation and analysis of how the teacher provides beginner reading instruction. The classroom interactions between the teacher and her learners were primarily observed. The interactions among the learners during beginner reading instruction were also observed. Considering the fact that learners do not only learn at school but also in their social setting, the parents’ input into how they promote reading development at home also received attention. This ethnographic case study, therefore, focuses on presenting a holistic record in an authentic context of how beginner readers in a selected classroom in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal learn to read.

#### **4.2.2 The researcher’s role**

Several ethnographic studies refer to the aim of wanting to understand an ‘emic’ or insider, rather than an ‘etic’ or outsider perspective on a given topic (Godley, Carpenter & Werner 2007; Canagarajah 2011; Hopwood 2007). The advantage of an ‘insider perspective’ is that the researcher is able to gain a better insight and understanding of the group (Leedy &

Ormrod 2010:139). As an ‘insider’ the researcher often becomes more than an observer; he or she actively participates and engages with the participants, becoming involved in many activities of their daily lives. In this capacity the researcher is referred to as a ‘participant-observer’ (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:139; Lichtman 2014:103).

A qualitative researcher has the task of reporting views, beliefs or events from the participants’ perspective (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:323). Yin (2011:7-8) supports this notion and affirms, among others, the following important characteristics of qualitative research: studying the meaning of people’s lives in their natural contexts, and representing the views and perspectives of the participants. The researcher, therefore, assumes the important role of being the primary ‘instrument’ in data-collection (Yin 2011:13). Using an interpretive paradigm also acknowledges that reality is socially constructed and that researchers seek to understand what meanings people give to that reality (Check & Schutt 2012:150).

I assumed the role of participant observer throughout this study. I made myself available to assist in an unobtrusive manner in the classroom during my observation sessions; however, whenever the teacher deemed it necessary. I spent approximately three to five hours per week during the entire first term of school in 2016 (January to March) in the classroom, from Monday to Friday, and scheduled my observation sessions according to the selected teacher’s timetable. I observed reading instruction lessons and the day-to-day interactions that occurred between the teacher and the learners, and also between the learners during these lessons. I made extensive field notes of my observations and interviews throughout the study, and recorded my experiences, thoughts and reflections in a diary. (The data-gathering process will be discussed in greater detail in section 4.3.3.2).

## **4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **4.3.1 Selection of the school**

For the purpose of this ethnographic case study, one class of Grade 1 learners was selected at a public primary school in the Umlazi District, Kwazulu Natal. Considering that I would be immersed in the daily lives of the learners and would spend several hours a week in the classroom, I chose to conduct the study at the school where I am employed as a learning

support teacher, with the consent and support of the principal. The methods for the aforementioned selection (of the school) included both purposive and convenience sampling. *Purposive sampling* is used when the researcher selects individuals who will generate the most information concerning the specific topic or investigation (Ormrod & Leedy 2010:147; Check & Schutt 2012:105). *Purposeful sampling* has the advantage of assisting the researcher in gaining a greater insight into and understanding of a particular topic (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:319). *Convenience sampling* involves using a group of subjects that are easily accessible, such as a class at one's own university or school (McMillan and Schumacher 2010:137).

The selected primary school, which will be referred to by the pseudonym of 'Blue Primary', is in a suburban area in the Umlazi district of the eThekweni region in the province of KwaZulu Natal. It is a quintile 5 public school. Schools in South Africa are ranked from quintile 1 to quintile 5, depending on the degree of poverty experienced by the community. A quintile 1 school is the poorest of the quintiles while a quintile 5 school is a well-resourced school within a more affluent community (DBE 2011a:21). Although Blue Primary is a quintile 5 school, learners from varying socio-economic backgrounds attend the school. The school is fully inclusive, and accommodates learners who require a low to medium level of learning support (DBE 2014:12-16).

Blue Primary comprises learners from Grade 1 to Grade 7, and had 749 learners enrolled for the year 2015 (EMIS 2015). Grade 1 consists of four classes consisting of 110 learners in total. The school has 39 teaching staff members, of which 21 are paid by the state and 16 by the School Governing Body. The Foundation Phase classes have teacher assistants who help the teacher for two to five hours per day, depending on the grade. Two teachers offer learning support in the Foundation Phase, of which I am one.

Blue Primary is a well-maintained and well-resourced school. Each classroom has an interactive whiteboard with access to the internet. Although the school has a well-stocked library, each Grade 1 classroom also has a reading corner. The learners are in a 'print-rich' environment and have access to many books of varying levels of difficulty. There is a computer room, an art room and a music room. The Grade 1 learners attend computer and music lessons with specialist teachers (teachers trained specifically to teach these subjects), but do art in their own classrooms with their class teachers. The Grade 1 learners attend

school from 07h30 in the mornings until 13h00 in the afternoons from Monday to Thursday but go home at 11h50 on a Friday. Many extra-mural activities are offered after school hours by the teachers, at no cost to the learners or their parents/guardians. There is a privately-owned After Care facility on the premises for the Grade 1 to Grade 7 learners.

Workshops are held by the school for the Foundation Phase to inform the parents as to how reading is taught at Blue Primary, as well as how the parents can help to promote reading at home.

#### **4.3.1.1 Reading instruction at Blue Primary**

The learners are instructed in English Home Language (HL), with Afrikaans offered as a First Additional Language (FAL) from Grade 1. The reading instruction programme used by Blue Primary is the ‘Teaching Reading Handwriting and Spelling Skills’ (THRASS) programme. THRASS was originally designed by Alan Davies, with copyright resources published in England in 1989, 1992, 1994 and 1995 (Barker 2012:2). Alan Davies is “an English chartered educational psychologist, former teacher and teacher trainer and associate fellow of the British Psychological Society” (Davies & Ritchie 2003:3). Denyse Ritchie, author, teacher and teacher trainer from Western Australia joined forces with Alan Davies in 1995 (Davies & Ritchie 2003:3). In 2008 THRASS Sing-A-Long resources were created by Alan Davies and Janine Plunkett (with a contribution by Mike Meade), and were added to the THRASS programme. In 2012 the THRASS copyright was bought by Bidvest Paperplus (Pty.) Ltd. (Barker 2012:2). I received permission from Bidvest Paperplus (Pty.) Ltd. to photograph their charts and parts of the Grade 1 Teacher’s Guide.

Davies and Ritchie (2003:9) describe the THRASS programme as focusing on the 44 phonemes and the related graphemes (spelling choices). There are 120 key graphemes represented on the THRASS chart (see figure 4.2), accompanied by a picture and keyword (e.g., /b/bb/ are the key graphemes for the /b/ sound and are represented by the pictures of a bird and a rabbit with the corresponding words written below them) (see figure 4.1). Barker (2012:5) describes the THRASS programme as “a phonographic programme as it teaches the relationships between phonemes and graphemes”.

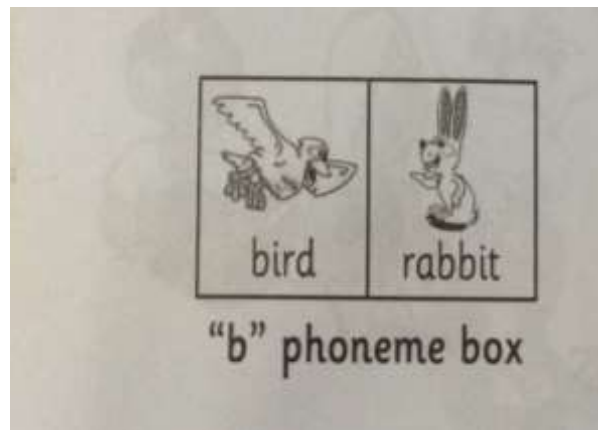
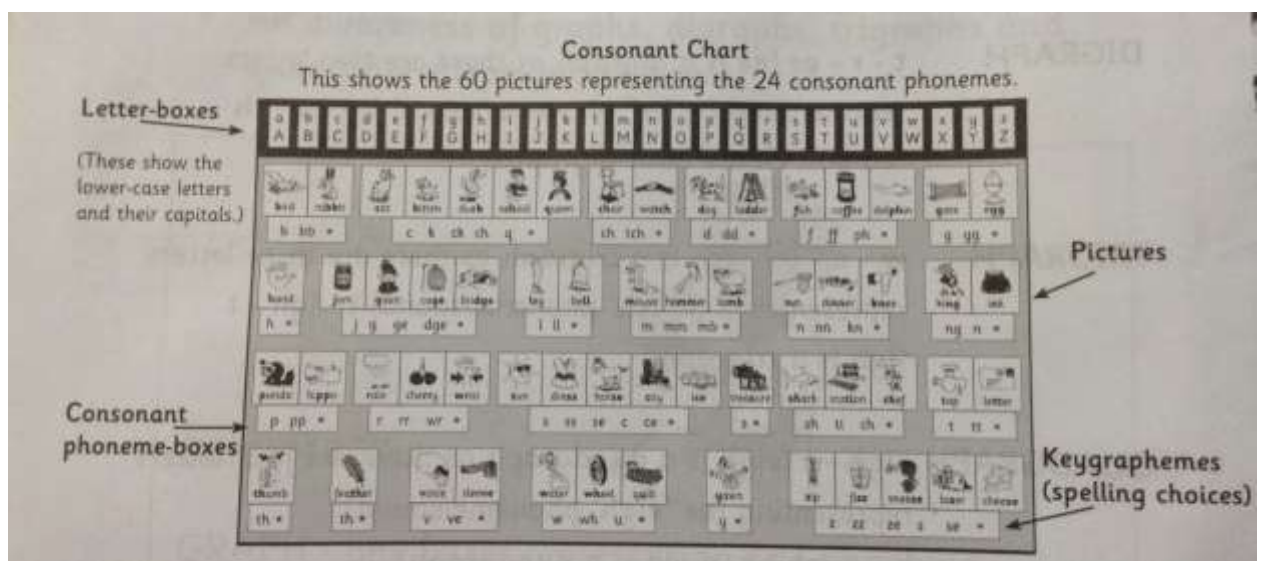


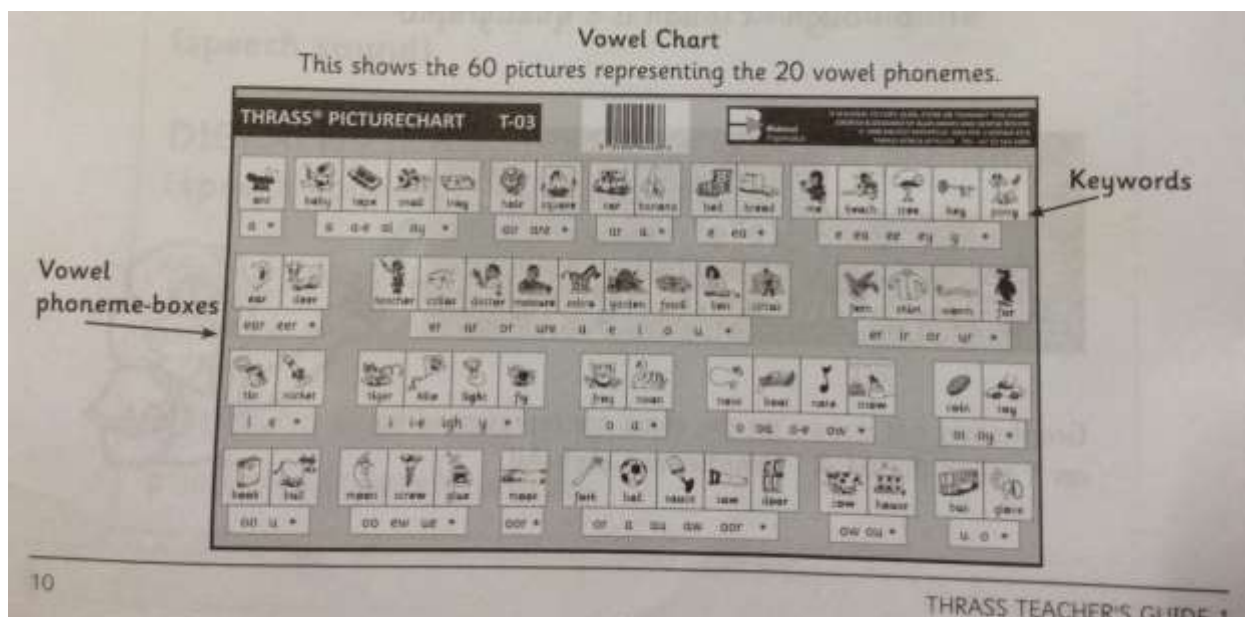
Figure 4.1: The /b/ phoneme box



Figure 4.2: The THRASS Picture Charts – Consonant side (top, vowel side below)





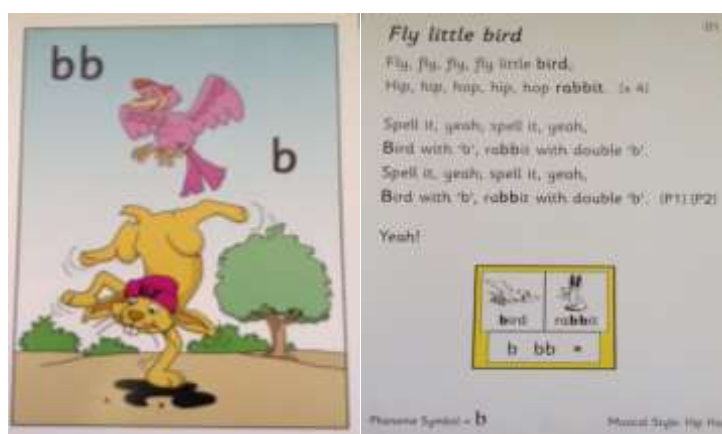


**Figure 4.3: Explanation of the THRASS picture charts (Barker 2012:10)**

There are several resources available to purchase with the THRASS programme, namely various charts, manuals, flashcards, interactive computer software, homework books, class workbooks, reading books, posters and CDs. The THRASS picture chart is a colourful chart with 120 illustrations grouped together in phoneme boxes (referred to as ‘houses’), according to the phoneme (sound) represented (Barker 2012:10) (see figure 4.1). The THRASS picture charts (referred to simply as a ‘chart’) come in two different sizes. There are two large charts for classroom use (to be hung on a wall) and a smaller desk chart to be used by the learners at their desks or during ‘carpet work’, or at home for revision.

From Grade 1 at Blue Primary the learners are exposed to all 44 phonemes and the correlating 120 graphemes. However, they learn the different phoneme/grapheme relationships systematically from Grade 1 to Grade 3, according to the English Home Language CAPS policy document guidelines (Barker 2012:18, 22-23). The THRASS programme uses stories and songs to teach and consolidate the various phoneme/grapheme relationships. Each phoneme box consists of a story and a song. The story is supplied in the THRASS Teacher’s Guide. The teacher is at liberty to create her own PowerPoint or other visual aids. The songs are available in the form of ‘Sing-A-Long’ interactive software, a CD and a DVD. There is also a Sing-A-Long A3 poster pack available (see figure 4.3). Each song has one poster to guide the singing and for discussion purposes (Barker 2012:13, 46).

THRASS-IT software is available to purchase and is used on a ‘smart board’ or computer. The THRASS-IT software allows its users to spell words by sounding them out.



**Figure 4.4: Example of THRASS Sing-A-Long Poster** (front (left) and back (right))

Songs in the form of ‘raps’ (available on CD) are used to teach the alphabet names, the pictures (on the chart) and the sounds (phonemes) on the consonant and vowel sections of the THRASS chart. There are seven picture cards per set of ‘raps’, except for the last set where there are only four cards. Each chart has nine sets of ‘raps’ that need to be taught (i.e., nine consonant ‘raps’ and nine vowel ‘raps’). The ‘raps’ have a sequence of seven pictures, letters or phonemes. The sequence has a rhythm of two beats, three beats and seven beats, for example:

Pictures: “Bird, rabbit (2)/ bird, rabbit, cat (3)/ bird, rabbit, cat, kitten, duck, school, queen (7)” (Barker 2012:24). The learners are taught the letter names of the alphabet, using the same rhythm (e.g., “A, B (2)/ A, B, C (3)/ A, B, C, D, E, F, G (7)” (Barker 2012:24).

The THRASS programme is very explicit and systematic about how phonics and reading should be taught. The Teacher’s Guides have weekly lesson plans with suggestions for a variety of games and activities to teach the various sounds (Barker 2012).

### **4.3.2 Selection of the participants**

#### **4.3.2.1 The teacher and the Head of Department (Foundation Phase)**

I informally interviewed the four Grade 1 teachers at Blue Primary. Miss Smith (pseudonym) was selected to participate in this study. She was selected on grounds of the following criteria: she is suitably qualified (B.Ed. degree (Foundation Phase), University of the Witwatersrand); she has undergone extensive training in the THRASS programme at the University of the Witwatersrand; and she was willing to participate in this classroom-based ethnographic study. Moreover, she has more than six years teaching experience (Grade 1 and Grade 2). In particular, she has been teaching Grade 1 for the past four years. She is also the Grade Head for Grade 1. This involves, namely coordinating the curriculum (year plan, term plan and weekly plan of work and assessments); the homework for the grade; and ordering reading material for Grade 1. Miss Smith is also well-informed in respect of the current CAPS curriculum practices in the Foundation Phase. She has attended several courses relevant to teaching in the Foundation Phase offered by the Kwazulu Natal (KZN) Department of Education, as well as privately facilitated courses. Her home language is English and she is proficient in Afrikaans. She does not, however, speak an African language.

The Head of Department (HOD) of the Foundation Phase (Mrs. White) also participated in the study with the view to background information on beginner reading instruction at the school. She has been a teacher at Blue Primary for 40 years, and an HOD for the last 20 years. She was a keen participant and was eager to share her knowledge on how the Foundation Phase teachers work together to promote reading.

#### **4.3.2.2 The Grade 1 learners**

There were 29 learners registered in Miss Smith's class in 2016. All the learners in her class were included (with the parents' consent) in this ethnographic study. The DBE clearly advocates inclusion and makes this clear in their policy on inclusive education in Education White Paper 6 (DBE 2001). I honoured that policy, and no learners were excluded from the study, due to any barrier to learning they may experience. Nine learner participants from the three main languages represented in Grade 1 were selected for informal interviews: three

English-, three Afrikaans- and three isiZulu-speaking learners. These learners were selected primarily on grounds of their home language, but their selection was also based on their progress made with reading during my fieldwork. Miss Smith helped to select these learners as she knew their home language backgrounds and had closely monitored the progress they had made with beginner reading during the period of fieldwork. (The interview process will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter - see 4.3.3.2).

**Table 4.1 Characteristics of the learners who were interviewed**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age in years</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Home Language</b>	<b>Family Background</b>
Tracey	6	Female	English	Intact family, both parents matriculated, father is a tradesman.
Raul	6	Male	English	Intact family, both parents matriculated.
Rachel	7	Female	English	Single father, has a tertiary qualification.
Jason	6	Male	Afrikaans	Intact family, both parents have tertiary qualifications.
Dara	6	Female	Afrikaans	Intact family, both parents have tertiary qualifications.
Shaun	6	Male	Afrikaans	Intact family, father matriculated and is a tradesman; the mother exited school early.
Amile	6	Female	isiZulu	Single mother, tertiary qualification.
Nene	7	Male	isiZulu	Intact family, both parents have tertiary qualifications.
Nosipho	7	Female	isiZulu	Intact family, both parents have tertiary qualifications.

Table 4.1 indicates that the study comprised of five female learner participants and four male learner participants (three learners from English-, Afrikaans- and isiZulu-speaking homes). The average age of the learners was 6 years 7 months. Only one learner, Dara, could read before starting formal reading instruction in Grade 1. Seven of the families are intact, one single father was interviewed, only one parent exited school early, two fathers completed a

trade, three parents did not further their studies after completing the National Senior Certificate, and four families consisted of both parents with one or more tertiary qualifications.

#### **4.3.2.3 The parents**

All the parents in the selected class were asked to give their permission (Appendix F) for their children to participate in the study (see the section on ethics). Nine sets of parents (the mother, the father or both the parents) were also purposefully selected and asked to participate in an interview. The purposefully selected parents are the parents of the nine selected children (see Table 4.1 for their educational backgrounds).

#### **4.3.3.1 Entry into the field**

The area (natural setting) where data are collected in qualitative research is referred to as the *field* (Schumacher & McMillan 2010:348). In this study the field is, therefore, the selected Grade 1 classroom at Blue Primary. Fieldwork is the ‘essence’ of ethnography, so it is vital for the researcher to gain access into the field (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:139). Establishing a good rapport with the participants is an integral part of entering the field successfully (ibid.).

Throughout the year preceding the fieldwork (2015), I engaged in informal conversations with Miss Smith about my intended research. She showed great interest in my study and was keen to participate. We established a good professional relationship which facilitated entry into the field. However, as I only met the learners and their parents in January 2016, I had to build their trust in me over time. I explained my research project to both the learners and their parents at the first information evening held in the second week of January, 2016. Through honest and professional conduct I was able to gain the trust of both groups and I endeavoured to build and maintain good relationships with all the participants during the fieldwork. Throughout the fieldwork I strove to be a good observer, interviewer and listener (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:139).

#### **4.3.3.2 Data-gathering**

Data were mainly gathered using observation and interviews.

a) Observation

I was a participant observer every day (Monday to Friday) for a ten week-period (first term, 2016) in the selected Grade 1 classroom during reading instruction. This was a lengthy period, but was necessary to obtain detailed data on beginner reading (Stoner 2010:25). My initial observations determined the daily reading instruction routine in the class. Following this, I observed how the teacher carried out beginner reading instruction, her instructional strategies, her methods and her use of teaching and learning aids and materials. In particular, I observed the daily activities of the teacher in promoting reading instruction, the implementation of the English Home Language CAPS in these activities, and how she catered for the diverse needs of the learners. I observed the learners' participation in daily beginner reading instruction: their knowledge of the alphabet, concepts of print, phonological awareness and the vocabulary they used during these lessons. Likewise, I observed the activities the learners engaged in during the reading instruction, namely dancing, singing, listening to stories, retelling stories and reading (beginning reading). I took down extensive field-notes during my observations. Sometimes, at the teacher's request, I participated in the classroom activities and thus was unable to make notes immediately. The notes were written as soon as I left the field (reflex records) (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:354). Miss Smith and I kept our own journals to record and reflect on our experiences during the study. I also took photos of the artifacts in the classroom, and of the teacher's reading wall (including posters), the activities that the children engaged in during reading instruction, and the resources used during reading instruction.

b) Interviews

Several interviews were conducted with the adult participants. These interviews included formal and informal interviews. Formal semi-structured interviews (carried out at a time and at a venue according to the participants' preference) with the teacher, the parents and the HOD were audio-recorded on a digital recorder to facilitate the collection of accurate information. A flexible interview guide was used for each of the interviews with the teacher, the parents and the HOD respectively (Appendices I, K & J). I transcribed the recordings for the purposes of analysis. Shortly after the transcriptions were completed, copies of the transcripts were given to the participants to confirm the accuracy of our conversations, and to add or clarify any points, should they so wish.

I interviewed the Foundation Phase Head of Department (HOD) at the beginning of the study to determine why the school had chosen the reading programme they use (the THRASS programme) and how reading instruction is promoted in this phase of schooling. At the commencement of the study I conducted an in-depth interview with Miss Smith about her perceptions of how children learn to read and how she teaches reading (January 2016). I conducted another interview with her in mid-February 2016 and a final interview at the end of the study in March 2016. I used open-ended questions to gain insight into her opinions and beliefs regarding reading instruction (cf. Appendix I). Miss Smith and I also engaged in numerous informal conversations regarding the various aspects of reading instruction.

I interviewed the selected parents (a mother, a father or both the parents) at the end of the study period in order to gain insight into what they believe their role is in the process of their children learning to read, as well as any successes or challenges they may be facing in this regard. My interview was based on a flexible interview guide (cf. Appendix K).

I engaged in informal conversations with the learners in the classroom throughout the study about how they were experiencing learning to read. These conversations took place in a relaxed manner to help the children feel at ease. Where needed, I used two hand puppets to ‘talk’ to the learners about their reading experiences (Clark 2005:494). Towards the end of the study informal but more structured interviews were conducted with the nine selected learners (cf. Table 4.1) in a private room away from the classroom, with the parents’ consent. The conversations with these learners were flexible and based on an interview guide (cf. Appendix L).

#### **4.3.4 The analysis and the presentation of the data**

Qualitative data-analysis is an ‘inductive process’ which involves organizing the collected data into categories (or themes) which allows for the identification of patterns, showing the relationships among these categories (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:367). As mentioned in chapter 1 (par. 1.5.4), I organized, studied, classified and summarised the data.

To gain insight into how the data were analysed according to the above requires a more in-depth discussion.

Due to the large amount of data that had to be gathered, I transcribed the data at the end of every school day. The rough field-notes (written by hand in an exercise book) that were made during the observations or interviews were transcribed daily. At the end of the week I also incorporated references to my journal entries, as well as references from Miss Smith's journal into my notes. In transcribing my notes I ensured that the format used allowed for large margins for coding and for additional comments. I included words and phrases that were necessary to indicate what happened during an interview or observation (e.g., a long pause, being interrupted by the classroom intercom, etc.) (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:370).

The data were organized in digital and print files according to the collection-method used. The interviews were organized into the sub-categories of 'teacher', 'parents', 'HOD' and 'learners'. My observations were organized chronologically. Once the data were organized, I studied the entire data-set to gain a sense of it as a whole (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:153). This allowed me to write preliminary comments (in the margin) and to determine possible categories (highlighted in colour) (ibid.).

The data were analysed for small pieces of significant data that stand alone, whereby beginning the process of coding. These data segments contained one idea or significant piece of information, and could consist of a word, a sentence, several sentences or pages. I analysed the segments to reveal codes. Codes include activities, relationships, the context and the perspectives of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:371). I then grouped the codes into categories to determine patterns, which are the relationships among the categories (ibid). By identifying patterns I was able to gain a thorough understanding of the data, and this provided a framework for reporting the findings (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:378).

Once the entire data set was analysed, it was presented in a 'literary narrative', which included an in-depth description of the setting, an analysis of the group and a conclusion (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:141). The data that were gathered during the observations were discussed under the following themes, namely reading (including sight words), phonics (THRASS and alphabet knowledge), vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and comprehension. The interview data were presented under separate rubrics. Throughout, verbatim quotations and suitable illustrations of artefacts substantiated the discussion. By means of the



presentation of the data I aimed to portray the participants' views, perspectives and experiences. I strove to give the participants a 'voice' and reveal an in-depth view of the bounded socio-cultural group and all that it entailed (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:141). McMillan and Schumacher (2010:383) refer to this as a "thick description" of the presented data.

#### **4.3.5 Trustworthiness of the data**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:379), the trustworthiness of the data should be checked often, usually after each field experience, and particularly during pattern seeking; it is a process and not a single event. The triangulation of the data was employed to enhance its trustworthiness. As the data were collected by means of observations, interviews, journal entries and an examination of the artifacts, these multiple strategies assisted in interpreting the data accurately (ibid.). Furthermore, I requested the adult participants to read the transcriptions of my interviews with them and to check that their views or experiences were accurately represented. I showed Miss Smith my observation notes at the end of each week, and we informally discussed the findings. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:331-332) refer to these processes as 'participant reviews' and 'member checking'; that is, the verification of the data by the participants. Discrepant data (findings contrary to the emerging themes) were included, analysed and reported on.

Reflexivity is used in qualitative studies to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the data. It involves a deep and thorough examination of one's "personal and theoretical commitments to see how they serve as resources for selecting a qualitative approach, framing the research problem, generating particular data, relating to participants, and developing specific interpretations" (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:332). While conducting this study, I asked myself questions to determine my own biases and beliefs regarding beginner reading instruction. Keeping a journal enhanced this process. I also asked a colleague to review and discuss the initial analysis of the data. This is referred to as a 'peer debriefing' (ibid.). I remained in consultation with my supervisor throughout the organization of the data and the analysis process. She scrutinized the findings more than once. Finally, I provided a clear audit trail of the processes of sampling, data-gathering and analysis in this chapter and in the summary in chapter 1, as well as copies of the interview guides in the appendices. This audit trail may enable other researchers to review the process of the study and to carry out a similar

study, albeit with modification, under comparable circumstances (Schumacher & McMillan 2010:335).

By means of the abovementioned processes and strategies the trustworthiness of data was strengthened. The use of ‘thick’ descriptions (detail) of the data also allows readers to interpret and come to their own conclusions (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:100).

#### **4.3.6 Ethical considerations**

It is important to carefully consider and examine all aspects of ethics when conducting a study, especially where children are involved as participants. Leedy and Ormrod (2010:101) suggest that the following four categories are important during research, namely protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues.

Protection from harm: It is important to protect all the participants from harm, both physical and emotional (psychological) (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:101). When talking informally to the learners about how they experienced learning to read, I used two hand puppets (cf. 4.3.3.2b). One puppet is made to fit a child’s hand, and the other for an adult’s hand. These puppets ‘talk’ to each other, and thereby help the child to express his or her feelings and experiences in a safe and unthreatening manner (Clark 2005:494). Thus, the learners were given a ‘voice’ and were empowered to express their views in a fun way that would not cause them any stress or harm (Tangen 2008:158).

Informed consent: Consent to conduct this study was obtained in writing from the Kwazulu Natal Department of Education (cf. Appendix C), the principal of Blue Primary (cf. Appendix B), Miss Smith (cf. Appendix D), the Head of Department of the Foundation Phase (cf. Appendix E), all the parents in the class (cf. Appendix F), and the selected parents (cf. Appendix G). Assent was obtained from all the learners in the class (Check & Schutt 2012:54) (cf. Appendix H). Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee, College of Education, University of South Africa (UNISA) (cf. Appendix O). Furthermore, participation in the study was voluntary and the participants were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time should they wish to, or to refrain from answering questions. No participant was rewarded or compensated in any way for participating in the study.

Right to privacy: Pseudonyms were used for all the participants, and any identifying detail was removed from the data. Strict confidentiality was upheld and maintained at all times throughout the study. The participants' views were not misrepresented in any way, and they were given the opportunity to review the data throughout the study. Adherence to strict ethics throughout the research process afforded the participants 'a voice' while remaining anonymous.

Finally, I made arrangements to disseminate the findings to all the participants. Firstly, I discussed the preliminary findings of the study with the principal, the teacher and the HOD at the end of the fieldwork. After the successful completion of the research study, the principal, HOD, the teacher and the participating parents would be invited to an information evening where I will present the findings, and the participants will be invited to comment on the findings. A PowerPoint presentation will be used to facilitate understanding and to make any recommendations based on the findings. Thereafter, the teacher and I will present the findings to the learners during an appropriate lesson. An electronic summary of the findings will be made available to the teacher, the school and the KZN Department of Education after the successful completion of the degree.

The electronic data will be stored on a password locked computer in my home office for a period of five years. The hard data will also be stored in a locked cupboard in my home office for a period of five years. Thereafter it will be destroyed.

#### **4.4. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter full details were given of the design and the process of the ethnographic case study. Multiple methods of qualitative data-gathering were used with the view to the exploration of the promotion of beginner reading in a Grade 1 class.

In the following chapter the findings of the study will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter the researcher will present the findings of the ethnographic study on the promotion of beginner reading in a Grade 1 classroom in the Umlazi District of KwaZulu Natal. Qualitative research techniques were used to gather the data. An interpretive paradigm was used and states that reality is socially constructed and that researchers seek to understand what meanings people give to that reality (Check & Schutt 2012:150). Due to the voluminous amount of data gathered, I placed the discussions and interviews in the most logical and sequential order for ease of reading. The interview with the Head of Department of the Foundation Phase is discussed first to indicate the role the school plays in supporting and promoting the development of reading in that phase. Thereafter, I will discuss the first interview with the Grade 1 teacher with a view to understanding her thinking and beliefs on reading instruction. Following this a review is given of the findings of my observations of reading instruction in the Grade 1 classroom. These findings were organised according to the five main components of reading instruction (reading; phonics and sight words; vocabulary; phonemic awareness; and comprehension). Each respective component is furthermore discussed under the following sub-headings: the role of the teacher, the participation of the learners, and the support of the parents. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the experiences and the journey of a Grade 1 teacher during the study, which is based on the second and third interviews conducted with her.

#### **5.2 THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF THE FOUNDATION PHASE**

The Head of Department (HOD) of the Foundation Phase at Blue Primary, Mrs. White (pseudonym), has been a teacher for forty years and a HOD for the last twenty years. She has experienced the implementation of several different reading instruction programmes throughout her career, including the Gay Way Series, the Breakthrough to Literacy Series and the Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS) programme. The school chose to use the THRASS programme as their method of reading instruction approximately eight years ago. Mrs. White believes that using the THRASS programme is very beneficial to

learners who are learning to read, especially for those learners who are struggling, because the learners will be able to “differentiate between the different sounds far easier”.

Mrs. White has extensive experience with reading instruction and fully endorses the importance of being able to read. She stated, “Every subject relies on reading in some way. You’ve got to be able to read your material if you’re studying later on and reading is so important. You read in Mathematics as well, not just in English and language subjects, so reading is the cornerstone of all learning and if they [the learners] cannot read they will have a problem academically”.

Mrs. White continued to say that the school offers support to both the learners who are struggling to read and to their parents. The learners go to extra lessons with a learning support (remedial) teacher, and the teachers in the Junior Primary Phase of the school offer extra lessons after school. These lessons are all free of charge. In Grade 1 full-time teacher assistants help the learners with their work, including reading, during class time. In Grades 2 and 3 the assistants are there for two hours per day. The Foundation Phase hosts an annual workshop for the parents on how to help their child with homework, with a focus on reading. An information evening is held at the beginning of the year for Grade 1 to Grade 7 parents, running over two days. During this information evening the THRASS programme is explained to the parents. The parents are given the opportunity to ask questions and to order a THRASS chart which they can use at home. The THRASS chart for home-use is a colourful picture chart that is identical to the large one in the classroom, but smaller. It is a little bit bigger than an A4 size, and is called a ‘desk picture chart’ (Davies & Richie 2003:20). The learners can use this chart at home to practise the various sounds and alphabet names they are learning in class (cf. chapter 4, figure 4.2)

Mrs. White emphasized the fact that the teachers in the Foundation Phase work well together and share information to help promote reading instruction in the phase. She is happy with the way reading is taught and generally promoted in the Foundation Phase of the school, and stressed that, as a school, the Foundation Phase teachers are quite “forward thinking”. She concluded by saying, “You can never stand still, you always need to be improving what you’re doing”.

As HOD of the Foundation Phase, Mrs. White is clearly doing everything that she can to ensure that her department helps the learners to succeed at reading by offering them and their families the necessary support.

### **5.3 THE PARTICIPATING TEACHER**

An interview was conducted with Miss Smith. Her instructional practises were observed for this study. As stated earlier, I interviewed Miss Smith in a semi-structured manner three times during the fieldwork. The initial interview was conducted in mid-January, 2016 at the beginning of the study; the second interview took place during the middle of the study in the third week of February, and the final interview was held after I had concluded my observation period at the end of the first school term in March, 2016. Miss Smith and I also engaged in many informal discussions throughout the fieldwork which I noted in my diary entries. She also kept her own diary in which she reflected on her many experiences during the study. These will be reported on later in this chapter (cf. 5.5).

I observed Miss Smith from the first day of the school year in 2016 until the end of term 1 in March, for three to five hours per week. In mid-February I realised that it would be beneficial to observe Miss Smith for a full week, from the start of the school day at 07:45 until the end of the school day at 13:00. Due to the many activities which occurred at the school, this proved very difficult, as there were school photograph sessions, the school's Open Day and the swimming gala, to name a few. I was therefore unable to observe Miss Smith for a full week. With the permission of the principal I was able to arrange to attend her class the following week, and was able to observe her and the Grade 1's for a full week from 07:45 until 13:00. During this time I was able to observe how Miss Smith taught reading and how she taught and incorporated language across the curriculum (cf. 5.4.2.1). After this full week of observation, I returned to observing Miss Smith and her Grade 1's for three to five hours per week for the duration of the study.

#### **5.3.1 The initial interview**

I began the study by interviewing Miss Smith in mid-January. The main aim of my initial interview was to identify the theories that drive Miss Smith's reading instruction practices, her teaching methods, her opinion of the importance of learning to read, how she intended to

cater for the diverse needs of the learners, and how she planned to apply the CAPS document guidelines for English Home Language during reading instruction (cf. 3.4.1.2, 3.5.1, 3.5.1.1). This information would be used to evaluate and analyse how she taught reading.

Miss Smith believes that reading instruction is a vital life-skill that forms the “foundation of everything else that’s going to be learned.” This indicates that she has a good understanding of the importance of reading, and also of the significant role she plays as a teacher who teaches young learners to read.

When asked what theoretical perspectives inform her reading instruction, Miss Smith declared, “I would say mostly THRASS has underpinned a lot of what I do. I studied in this quite comprehensively as well as with the man who put it all together, Alan, and that will inform a lot of my teaching and reading instruction and I base it a lot on phonics”. The THRASS programme was described in chapter 4 (cf. par. 4.3.1.1). When I observed Miss Smith’s reading instruction lessons, she did indeed primarily use phonics to teach reading. Being the main method of reading instruction promoted by the school throughout the Foundation Phase, it corroborates with what the HOD said in her interview regarding the use of the THRASS programme as a tool for reading instruction. (A thorough discussion of Miss Smith’s instructional practices will be presented later in this chapter - cf. 5.4.1.1; 5.4.2.1; 5.4.3.1; 5.4.4.1; 5.4.5.1).

Miss Smith stated that she uses a variety of teaching methods to teach reading, including auditory, visual and kinesthetic approaches. She uses different activities, such as role play, listening to stories, and moving objects on a ‘smart board’. Miss Smith’s replies indicate that she uses a multi-sensory approach to reading instruction. A multi-sensory approach is described by Gunning (2014:243) in Chapter 2 of this study (cf. 2.4.1.3) and includes the movement or physical activity (kinesthetic) and touch (tactile) senses to support the auditory and visual senses. Examples of how Miss Smith used a multi-sensory approach to reading instruction (specifically with regard to letter/sound identification) are discussed in paragraph. 5.4.1.1.

When asked how Miss Smith caters for the diverse needs of her learners, especially learners from different language backgrounds, she initially focused her answer on how she would ensure that the learners understood the vocabulary to be used and that she would include

small group teaching to help achieve this. Miss Smith then added that she would “provide one-on-one help as a teacher...I will give extra ideas of what to do at home”. This indicates that she values the notion that the parents play an important role in their children’s learning, and that learning to read does not only occur within the context of the classroom (Lemmer 2013:27-29).

Miss Smith had a sound grasp of what is expected from the teacher, according to the English Home Language Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) regarding reading instruction in Grade 1. She stated that she would teach the different areas “like phonics, vocabulary, sight words, comprehension and phonemic awareness,” which “fall into the different categories of CAPS, being listening and speaking, reading and phonics, handwriting and then writing”. (A thorough review of how Miss Smith incorporated the aforementioned characteristics of reading will be discussed later in this chapter - cf. 5.4.1.1; 5.4.2.1; 5.4.3.1; 5.4.4.1; 5.4.5.1).

Miss Smith believes that she is “blessed” to be at Blue Primary, as the school is a well-resourced school; each classroom has access to the internet and is provided with ‘smart boards’. She is also happy with the support she gets from the HOD of the Foundation Phase. Miss Smith concluded this interview by stating that one of her main aims is to encourage and foster a love for reading in the learners.

## **5.4 THEMES EMERGING FROM THE STUDY**

During my observations, I recorded each lesson by means of a digital audio recorder, and I wrote field-notes. After the first three days of observation, I determined that it would be better and more logical to record (using field-notes) the lessons under several pre-selected categories. The initial categories included reading (including sight words), phonics (THRASS and alphabet knowledge), vocabulary and phonemic awareness. These categories emerged rather quickly and obviously in the first two weeks of Miss Smith’s lessons. The motivation to use these categories was consolidated by the CAPS policy document for English Home Language (DBE 2011b:14), which includes phonemic awareness, word recognition (including sight words and phonics), comprehension and vocabulary as important characteristics of reading instruction. Although reading fluency is discussed in the CAPS policy document for English Home Language (DBE 2011b:18), it will not be discussed in



this study because the Grade 1 learners who were observed were in the early stages of learning to read. Miss Smith therefore did not focus on fluency at this early stage of reading.

Comprehension emerged during the analysis of the data as one of the five main categories, even though it was not used as a pre-selected category during data-gathering. Although comprehension occurs within the context of reading and vocabulary, it will also be discussed in isolation, as it is an important component of reading instruction (DBE 2011b:14).

The aforementioned categories will be discussed thoroughly within the context of the teacher's instructional practices (the role of the teacher), the participation of the learners and the support of the parents. Throughout the data-gathering process pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants (cf. 4.3.2.2: Table 4.1).

#### **5.4.1 Phonics**

As mentioned earlier, Blue Primary uses THRASS as their programme to teach phonics. The DBE (2011b:15) states that a school is at liberty to select its own phonics programme, and that the programme should “support explicit and systematic teaching of phonics through the school”. This means that sounds are taught according to a planned sequence, and the relationship between the letters and the sounds are made explicit to the learners (Caldwell & Leslie 2013:68). Phonics instruction must be clear and direct (Gillet et al. 2012:137). The teachers can help learners by demonstrating and verbalising what they are doing (Walpole & McKenna 2007:58).

A review of how Miss Smith taught phonics explicitly and systematically is presented in the ensuing paragraph.

##### **5.4.1.1 The role of the teacher**

During the first week of school the learners were introduced to the THRASS chart. Miss Smith explained how the chart works, as not all the local pre-schools make use of the THRASS programme to teach phonics in Grade R. Miss Smith explained the terminology that would be used daily (e.g., phoneme, spelling choice, ‘street’ and ‘house’). She explained

that each ‘house’ (phoneme box) makes a sound when you knock on it, like knocking on a door. Miss Smith explained the term ‘phoneme’ in the following way:

“When I answer the phone, can I see the other person on the phone? [*Learners mumbled ‘no’*]. “No, I can’t. Some phones are very fancy nowadays so maybe some of your moms and dads do look at the person who’s on the phone, but most of us still use a phone where we phone somebody. We put it to our ear and do we look at them or do we just speak to them?”

The learners replied in unison, “We speak to them”.

“Okay, put up your hands. I hear them speaking to me, I hear a noise. So this sound /b/ [*pointing at her large THRASS chart*] or any of the sounds, you’re going to hear me say that they are phonemes. They are sounds and you will remember that it is a sound because I answered the phone. So it sounds the same, a phoneme. So when I say, ‘What is the phoneme?’ I’m asking you what the sound is”.

Whenever Miss Smith said the word ‘phoneme’ she held her hand to her ear like a telephone, as a visual reminder for the learners.

The learners learnt one consonant sound a week until week five. From week five they learnt two consonant sounds a week and one vowel sound. When introducing a new sound (consonant or vowel), Miss Smith followed an interesting routine. She asked the learners to pretend getting into a car and ‘driving’ to the relevant sound on the THRASS chart. This procedure was made possible because the rows on the THRASS charts are called ‘streets’ (by the Grade 1 teachers at Blue Primary) and the sound (phoneme) boxes are referred to as ‘houses’ (Barker 2012:25). Considering the importance of phonics and the consistency with which it was taught, a thorough account of this routine is valid. Below is an account of this routine.

“Right, I want you all to climb in your cars, clip your seatbelts in, start your cars [*much car noise from the learners*] and please drive. Where are we driving to? [*A learner answered, “The consonant cit.”*] Right, well done! We’re driving to the consonant city. Let’s turn into street one and stop at house number one. Stop, switch off your cars, unclip your seatbelts. We are now going to knock at house number one. We’re in street one at house number one.

Now I want to see if you can remember who's going to answer us. Let's see [*teacher knocks on the THRASS chart on the wall*] Who's going to answer?"

The learners replied in chorus, "/buh/buh/buh/" and not with a short, clear /b/b/b/.

Miss Smith noticed this and said, "Well done, remember it's a short, quick sound, /b/b/b/.

After the learners said the relevant sound, Miss Smith pointed out the THRASS keywords and the key graphemes for the sound. She did this every week with every sound they 'visited'. The learners enjoyed the physical participation. The correct pronunciation of the relevant sound was modelled by Miss Smith and reinforced every week. This explicit instruction by the teacher is a vital part of learning phonics (cf. 2.4.1.3). Miss Smith gave clear and consistent phonics instruction throughout the observation period. This ensured that she provided her learners with the best chance possible of understanding and learning new sounds (Gillet et al. 2012:137).

Miss Smith also made sure the learners understood the connection between the THRASS keyword and the corresponding phoneme by asking the learners to guess the sound they would be 'visiting' by listening to the keywords. This routine was continued with every sound from week three until the end of the term as follows:

"We are going to visit our next sound now, our next phoneme. This phoneme is still in the consonant city; so we are going to travel to the consonant city; we are going to travel to street one. But before we get there I want to see if you can hear the sound that is the same in all these words. So, let's say these words together. [*The learners said the words with the teacher*] /cat/, /kitten/, /duck/, /school/, /queen/. Listen to the words. I will say them again [*The teacher emphasised the /c/ sound*]. /**cat**/, /**kitten**/, /**duck**/, /**school**/, /**queen**/. What sound can you hear that's the same in all of them, hands up?"

The learners would say the sound and then they would 'get into their cars and drive' to the relevant 'house' in the manner described earlier.

Miss Smith reinforced the idea that each ‘house’ has a different sound by laminating a picture of a house and using pictures of the keywords with the corresponding graphemes to stick onto the ‘house’ (see Figure 5.1). Later on in the term she added the keywords.



**Figure 5.1: Example of phoneme boxes called “houses”**

Miss Smith noted that some learners were still battling to grasp the concept of a ‘house’ having one sound. She met with her Grade 1 colleagues and they shared ideas on what they do to overcome this problem. One teacher explained that she lets the learners write on their THRASS charts with a ‘dry board marker’. The learners circle the relevant sound or word and they draw their own house around the phoneme (sound) box. Miss Smith used this activity and it seemed to help the learners to understand the concept better. The use of both the visual and tactile senses (writing on the charts) was a good way of incorporating a multi-sensory approach to helping the children with this task (Gunning 2014:243). Miss Smith regularly did this exercise during the duration of the term. This was an example of how the Grade 1 teachers work collaboratively and share ideas to help improve reading instruction, as the HOD of the Foundation Phase indicated in the interview with her.

With the introduction of each sound, Miss Smith asked the learners to name objects that start with the particular sound. She did this from week two until the end of the term. It was such a consistent part of her THRASS lessons that the learners began to anticipate it. Most of them fared well with this activity, often listing many objects. For some of the lessons there would be several pictures on the ‘smart board’ and the learners had to identify which pictures started with the relevant sound. Miss Smith sometimes changed the activity by asking the learners to

draw pictures on their ‘dry erase boards’ or they drew pictures in their ‘busy books’, which were labelled (pictures) by Miss Smith and myself. Scanlon et al. (2010:134) state that these types of exercises, where the learners have to detect the beginning letter sound, help them to later apply their letter/sound understanding during writing exercises. Gunning (2014:211) adds that the segmentation skill (‘breaking words up’) assists in identifying beginning sounds. The learners played a game while looking for things that start with /d/ (see figure 5.2). Below is an account of this game, and how Miss Smith demonstrated and talked through exactly what she expected the Grade 1 learners to do.

“You are going to walk around the classroom. I would hold my board, I would walk and I would draw my door. [*She demonstrated this as she was talking*]. When I am done I will silently walk back and sit at my spot.”

The learners were asked to draw at least four objects (see figure 5.2).

Walpole and McKenna (2007:58) support the use of the teacher demonstrating aspects of a lesson to the learners. Scanlon et al. (2010:19-20) furthermore support the notion of the teacher guiding the learners through demonstration, and particularly ‘thinking aloud’, as Miss Smith demonstrated above.



**Figure 5.2: A Grade 1's work of objects beginning with /d/**

It was evident that Miss Smith spent a great deal of time planning her lessons and fun activities to keep all the learners engaged in the lesson. The learners who needed to move around were catered for and not restricted to being seated for a long time.

Another consistent activity each week during the phonics lesson was identifying the position of a particular sound (beginning, middle or end). The beginning and end sound-identification were definitely easier for the learners than the middle sound. Although this was primarily a phonemic awareness activity, it was done during the phonics lessons.

Miss Smith incorporated a multi-sensory approach to teaching letter names and sounds (Gunning 2014:243-244). She made use of movement to teach the sounds by asking the learners to make a particular letter of the alphabet with their bodies or to become (act out) an animal or object, such as a dog or a ball. She also drew a huge letter of the sound being learnt on the floor with chalk and the learners jumped around the letter in the same manner that it should be written e.g., Miss Smith drew the letter /m/ and the children jumped in the same direction as if they were writing it with a pencil. Miss Smith demonstrated how she wanted the learners to jump around each letter. This was an interesting activity to witness, as so many learners battled to jump or hop on the line of the letter. The learners also regularly wrote the letter of the sound they were learning in the air. Another fun multi-sensory activity that was used to learn and consolidate a sound was to make a letter and a corresponding object with play dough (e.g., /b/ with a picture of a butterfly or a ball).

For each sound that the learners learnt they completed a relevant activity in their THRASS class books. Miss Smith consistently demonstrated what she wanted the learners to do by showing them on her 'smart board'. She made the learners repeat the instructions to her before they started a task. She did some of the activities step-by-step with the learners because she knew from previous experience that some exercises had proven too difficult to complete independently. Miss Smith would model 'self-talk' (Woolfolk 2010:46) to explain to the learners exactly what she was doing.

A regular activity observed during the THRASS lessons was 'going through' the keywords on the consonant section of the THRASS chart in the form of a 'rap'. The THRASS programme incorporates 'raps' as part of their programme. There are nine consonant 'raps' and nine vowel 'raps'. The 'raps' have a sequence of seven pictures, letters or phonemes. The sequence has a rhythm of 2 beats, 3 beats and 7 beats". (Barker 2012:24). Miss Smith first modelled the 'rap' while pointing to her big THRASS chart on the wall. She started this in week 2 and only did the first two phoneme boxes, e.g., bird, rabbit (2), bird, rabbit, cat (3), bird, rabbit, cat, kitten, duck, school, queen (7). She extended the 'rap' each week by adding

more words from the THRASS chart until the learners were able to say the entire consonant section of the THRASS chart, e.g., the learners could say the 'rap' from /bird/ until /cheese/. Miss Smith did not initially use the music that accompanies the 'rap' which is part of the THRASS programme, namely a "Raps and Sequences CD" (Barker 2012:24) as she thought the rhythm was a bit fast for the new Grade 1 learners to sing to. She only introduced the music later on in the term. Miss Smith also introduced the phoneme 'rap', without music, to the Grade 1 learners. The phoneme 'rap' is more difficult as the learners are expected to only say the sounds and not the words, as explained above. The phoneme 'rap' is not mandatory in Grade 1, and is only recommended for Grade 2 and Grade 3 learners (Barker 2012:24). Miss Smith therefore spent all of term 1 revising the first ten phonemes on the THRASS chart, e.g., /b/, /c/, /ch/, /d/, /f/, /g/, /h/, /j/, /l/, /m/. She started off by introducing the first two phonemes and then added a third and then a fourth, and so on. She did not follow a strict routine with revising the phoneme 'rap'; she preferred to do the 'rap' with the learners when she had extra time. This meant that the class revised this particular phoneme 'rap' two to three times a week. Miss Smith modelled this 'rap' first, and then did it in chorus with the learners for the entire term. This 'rap' also helped the learners to consolidate the concept that the pictures, words and sounds correspond. The 'rap' was also a fun way of learning phonics (Harrison 2004:47).

Miss Smith daily revised the alphabet names and sounds. For this activity she used her big THRASS chart (on the wall of her classroom) and the smaller THRASS charts that are made for classroom and home use. The smaller THRASS charts are easy to handle and are printed on both sides. The learners were taught how to use these charts at the beginning of Grade 1 and used them to the end of Grade 3. Due to the printing on both sides, some learners battled to differentiate between the consonant section on the one side and the vowel section on the other side of the chart. Miss Smith provided support for these learners by telling them that they could find the alphabet on the side where the letter boxes were. This was on the consonant section of the chart. This visual landmark helped the learners to find the alphabet more easily.



**Figure 5.3: THRASS Picture charts (desk use) (Consonant side (left) Vowel side (right))**

Miss Smith systematically ‘went through’ the alphabet names from a-z on a daily basis. She ‘went through’ the alphabet sounds from a-g, and then added a few extra sounds each week until the entire alphabet was completed. The learners were daily given photocopies of the alphabet in little packets to take home and to revise for homework.

When ‘going through’ the alphabet, Miss Smith modelled the correct pronunciation of the names and the sounds. The learners initially battled to pronounce the letter names of /m/ and /n/ and often confused them. Miss Smith corrected them every time and demonstrated the correct pronunciation. She asked the learners to give her the names of the letters before or after specific letters. In this way she also taught the vocabulary of ‘before’ and ‘after’. After several lessons of consistent and systematic alphabet revision, Miss Smith asked the learners to give the names of the letters to which she pointed randomly.

With every new sound introduced, Miss Smith read the corresponding THRASS story and sang the THRASS song. This is an integral part of the THRASS programme and is supplied



with the programme in the form of a hard copy in a manual and as software called, ‘Sing-A-Long Interactive Software’ (Barker 2012:13). (This aspect will be discussed under the heading ‘Reading and sight words’ later in this chapter - cf. 5.4.2).

Towards the end of February Miss Smith divided all the learners into five reading groups according to their ability to read the sight words they had learnt the past few weeks and their knowledge of the alphabet. She also used these reading groups to reinforce and revise the phonics lesson taught that day. Some groups only revised the letters and sounds of the alphabet while other groups drew pictures, wrote the corresponding letters and said the word. Scanlon et al. (2010:38, 41) supported this idea of placing the learners into small groups according to their abilities as they believed that it enables the teacher to better provide differentiated instruction. (More examples of this group-work will be given later).

Miss Smith was consistent in using direct, explicit instruction during her phonics (THRASS) lessons. She always did revision before she started a new lesson which helped to consolidate the concepts being learnt. She consistently modelled what she expected from the learners and talked it through. This ‘self-talk’ is an important part of learning and provides scaffolding for the learners to achieve more than what they could on their own (Woolfolk 2010:46-47). *Scaffolding* is described by Woolfolk (2010: 50) as providing various types of support, including examples and step-by-step instructions in order to help the learners become more independent problem-solvers and learners.

#### **5.4.1.2 Participation of the learners**

The Grade 1 learners were very eager and enthusiastic to learn the new sounds. They enjoyed ‘driving’ to the ‘houses’ every time they learnt a new sound. Most of the learners sang the THRASS songs and did the actions. Two learners, Amile and Nosipho, always became excited at this stage, singing and dancing with much joy and enthusiasm. Nene struggled to sing some of the faster songs but managed to do the actions. He is a shy little boy, so this may have played a role in his limited involvement in the singing.

The learners enjoyed making letters with their bodies and ‘acting out’ the THRASS words, such as pretending to be a dog. The incorporation of movement captured the learners’ attention, and it thus made phonics more fun.

The learners were taught phonics as a whole class and in smaller groups from the end of February. During a class lesson on the /p/ sound, Dara noticed the /pp/ on the THRASS chart was a digraph and proudly told the class. Some learners seemed very eager to learn and absorb as much as possible from the THRASS lessons.

As stated earlier in this chapter, Miss Smith used the group reading session to revise the phonics lesson or to do a phonics activity relevant to each group's ability. During one reading lesson, she pointed out that /wr/ makes the sound /r/. Raul was so excited to learn this new information that he happily repeated it a few times.

Miss Smith gave the top group of readers specific pictures (from the THRASS chart) to draw on their dry erase boards and then they had to write the corresponding letters on their own using their THRASS charts, and to say the word. Figure 5.4 is an example of this exercise.



**Figure 5.4: Dara's drawings and corresponding letters**

One girl (Nosipho) in this group misunderstood the instruction to the activity and wrote each word out instead of only the key graphemes, e.g., /cat/, /ant/, /panda/. Miss Smith assisted her and then she did the exercise correctly. This was a good example of how working in a small group enables the teacher to offer immediate and precise learning support.

Two other groups worked on finding the beginning sound of a word on the laminated cards that had a picture with three letter options to choose from. The learners who found it difficult to remember their alphabet letters and sounds were given a blank laminated grid with nine squares which they practised on. Sometimes Miss Smith called out a letter name and the learners had to write it down, and at other times she called out the letter sound and they had to write down the letter that made that sound. This differentiated instruction seemed to help

extend the learners who needed it and to offer more learning support to learners who required additional support.

In general, the learners initially found it difficult to remember that the THRASS keyword /bed/ represented the short vowel sound /e/. They kept saying that /bed/ made the /b/ sound, but after much reinforcement and consolidation, they understood that it represented the short vowel /e/.

#### **5.4.1.3 Support of the parents**

As the HOD of the Foundation Phase mentioned in the interview with her, the parents were given the opportunity to attend a THRASS workshop at the beginning of the first term. The THRASS programme was covered in detail as well as ways of helping the learners with their phonics homework. The parents could ask questions during this workshop. They could also ask the class teacher any THRASS or phonics-related questions at the special information evening held in the second week of the first term.

One of the parents who were interviewed (Jason's mother) said she helped her child with his phonics homework as follows:

“I try and leave him to do it on his own but if he struggles I try to get him to spell it out.”

None of the parents interviewed mentioned that they experienced problems with the phonics homework. Rachel's father was happy with the clear and precise instructions in the THRASS homework given in the homework book. He felt that the pre-school had not guided him adequately to help prepare his daughter for Grade 1.

He said, “I prefer the regimented way of doing homework, I'm old school. Give me something I can work with.”

### 5.4.2 Reading and sight words

Reading is an integral part of every lesson in Grade one. Miss Smith integrated reading across the curriculum, including in subjects such as Mathematics, Life Skills and even during music lessons. This will briefly be reviewed later in this chapter (cf. 5.4.2.1).

Miss Smith maximised the learners' exposure to the written word by including sentences in the handwriting books, a 'word wall' in her classroom, labels around the classroom, including the days of the week and the months of the year, literacy posters (including colours, body parts, etc.), sentences written by the learners in their 'news' books, and the reading corner. Her reading corner has a variety of books that the learners are allowed to read once they have finished their work (see figure 5.5).



**Figure 5.5: The Word Wall and Reading Corner in Miss Smith's classroom**

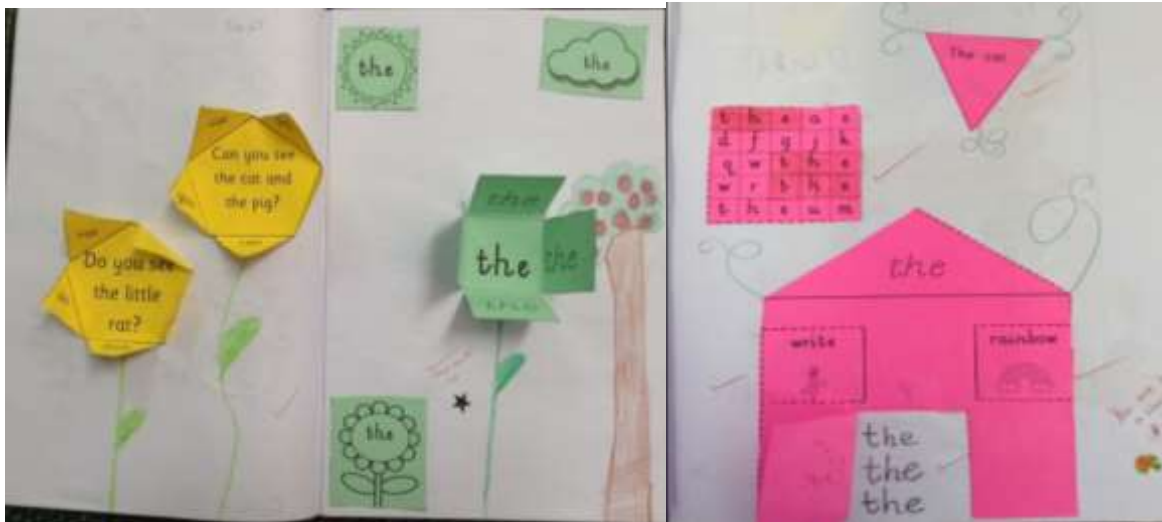
Gunning (2014:266) strongly advocates the use of a 'word wall' as it helps the learners to see and remember a variety of useful words, including high-frequency (sight) words. The reading lessons included reading the THRASS stories and the THRASS songs integral to and

included in the THRASS programme, sight words, shared reading ('Big Books') and small group reading lessons.

#### **5.4.2.1 The role of the teacher**

From the second school day in January, the Grade 1 learners were introduced to their first set of sight words. *Sight words* are described in the CAPS English Home Language policy document (DBE 2011b:16) as those words that the learners should be able to recognise by sight after many repetitions. These words include, but are not limited to, words that appear recurrently in a variety of texts. Each week Miss Smith introduced the learners to five to seven new sight words. These words were sent home daily for the learners to revise as homework in the form of small cut-out words.

The first words the learners read were /I/, /am/, /a/, /cat/. They first read them mixed up and then in the sentence, e.g., I am a cat. Each week before Miss Smith introduced the new sight words, she would revise the previous ones. The words were displayed on her 'smart board', accompanied by a picture where possible. Shanker and Cockrum (2009:31) advocate the use of words accompanied by pictures to help the learners consolidate and understand the sight words. Whenever the learners read the words incorrectly or when they guessed, Miss Smith would ask them to look at the first letter of the word and then to 'sound it out'. She explained to the learners that some words cannot be 'sounded-out' and just need to be learnt, such as the word /are/. Some of the sight words that were presented began with capital letters, such as the words, /The/ and /Can/. Miss Smith ensured that the learners saw the difference between the same word written with a capital letter and a lower case letter. This was to prepare the learners for reading and writing sentences. The sight words were read in isolation and in the form of sentences in books that Miss Smith had made. Caldwell and Leslie (2013: 86) support the practice of sight words in isolation, particularly for learners who are battling and who need to see the sight words more often to remember them. Miss Smith also asked the learners to give oral sentences for some sight words to ensure understanding. She taught the same sight words in a variety of ways to make learning more fun. Below is an example of an activity that incorporated cutting and sticking. This activity was done several times using different shapes. (See figure 5.6).



### Figure 5.6: Sight words activities

Miss Smith made simple reading books for each of the short vowel sounds, /a/e/i/o/u/. Each learner was given a copy of these reading books. These ‘reading books’ were practised daily in class and sent home as reading homework. Miss Smith used these simple ‘reading books’ to teach the learners the concept of print, such as the direction of reading, recognising a letter, a word or a sentence, punctuation, the cover and the back of the book (Gunning 2014:191). These ‘reading books’ also contained some basic sight words, and provided the learners with additional practice in these. Shanker and Cockrum (2009:33) support the use of ‘easy readers’ to help to improve the learners’ knowledge of the sight words. Miss Smith also introduced the word and the concept, ‘character’ to the learners by means of these simple books. The whole class daily read and discussed these books together and re-read them in their smaller reading groups. Miss Smith was able to detect more accurately who needed learning support during the smaller reading groups.

Miss Smith read ‘interactive stories’ relating to the short vowel sounds on the internet from a phonics website called Starfall (2002-2016). The learners enjoyed ‘reading’ these stories as they are fun and interactive. Several learners got a chance to touch (tactile) objects that move or make noises on the ‘smart board’. This indicated an effective use of the resources (the internet and the ‘smart board’). Making the learners read stories and simple books related to the phonic sound they were learning (that week, or had learnt previously) was a good way of encouraging the learners to apply their phonics skills (Shanker & Cockrum 2009:75).

Each week Miss Smith included shared reading in her literacy lessons (DBE 2011b:11). Before doing shared reading with 'Big Books', Miss Smith placed several sight words relevant to the story on her 'smart board'. She discussed the vocabulary relevant to the story. (This will be discussed later in the chapter under the heading 'Vocabulary' - cf. 5.4.3.1).

Before every 'Big Book' story, Miss Smith discussed the title, the spine of the book, the author, the illustrator, the cover of the book and the direction of reading namely from left to right. She did this consistently to ensure that all the learners could develop the concept of print (Gunning 2014:191). She discussed the picture on the cover of the book, and always asked the learners to predict what they thought the story was about. Miss Smith opened the book and the class discussed page by page what they thought was happening in each picture. Different learners responded differently to the same page, and each response was acknowledged and discussed.

The learners also listened to an audio recording of each 'Big Book' story. While they were listening to the story, Miss Smith held the book up and pointed to the words. Gunning (2014:195) indicates that when the teacher points to the words while the learners are reading with her she was showing the learners the concepts of separate words. By doing this, the learners begin to understand and learn that every word in the book (printed word) represents a spoken word. The learners would then say certain parts of the story in unison. During some weeks the learners 'acted out' parts of the story. An example of this was when the learners read the well-known children's story, 'The Gingerbread Man'. They had to pretend to be the Gingerbread Man and to run away from various characters, and thereafter to climb onto various parts of the fox. They thoroughly enjoyed 'acting' this 'out'. Jennings et al. (2010:280, 300) postulate that 'acting out' a story (or parts of it) helps the learners to remember the story and to identify with aspects of a character from the story. Miss Smith would also ask the learners to retell parts of the story, to list items (such as listing ingredients in the Gingerbread Man and The Little Red Hen) or to discuss the sequence of the events.

The 'Big Book' story was always followed by a fun activity, usually on a Friday. Some activities involved copying a sentence about the book from the 'smart board' and drawing a picture; other activities incorporated other aspects of reading, such as reading a recipe. Miss Smith used the story of the Little Red Hen to read a recipe and to make 'crackolates' with the Grade 1 learners.

Miss Smith put the recipe of the ‘crackolates’ on her ‘smart board’. She explained to the learners that she had read the recipe before going shopping so that she knew what to purchase. Miss Smith read the recipe and the learners repeated it after her. She read the recipe again and checked if she had all the ingredients in her shopping bag. A few learners were called to hold up an ingredient. Miss Smith then ‘went through’ the recipe and started mixing the ingredients. She explained the measurements (e.g., Tbl [tablespoon] and 30g) and they counted the relevant amounts. She called each learner up to spoon some of the ingredients into a cupcake holder. Once the learners asked her for the recipe, which she had not anticipated. She started by making them write the heading and then realised that copying the recipe was not going to work. She quickly went and printed a copy of the recipe for each learner. They decorated their recipes, and took them home. This was a good example of the need to be flexible in teaching. The availability of resources (the computer and printer) at the school made this possible. Sending the ‘crackolates’ recipe home was also an effective way of getting the parents involved in their child’s learning. It provided a literacy-rich platform for family interaction and discussion.

Miss Smith started group reading towards the end of February. She divided the learners into reading groups according to their abilities to read the sight words they had learnt the past few weeks and also their knowledge of the alphabet. She had five groups, ranging from three to six learners in a group. She started the reading groups by explaining and demonstrating how to read aloud and how to follow when someone else in the group was reading. The learners all started with the short vowel books (a/e/i/o/u) that Miss Smith had made. She used colour to show the learners the difference between a letter, a word and a sentence, as some learners were battling to see these differences on their own. When Miss Smith thought the group was ready, she issued each learner in the group with a reading book. Some groups were ready to read ‘proper’ books much sooner than the other groups, who needed more time to consolidate their alphabet sounds and sight words. All of the learners did the same activities, but just at a different pace (some learners needed a slower pace). By dividing the learners into small groups, Miss Smith was able to differentiate her instruction according to each group’s ability (Gillet et al. 2012:19).

When each group received a reading book, they were also issued with a ‘words’ book. This ‘words’ book contained all the words of the stories in each reading book. (See Figure 5.7).





**Figure 5.7: A page from the ‘words’ book**

Before each story the learners revised the words in the ‘words’ book. They also took the ‘words’ books home to revise (reading) words for homework. Miss Smith used the ‘words’ book to ask the learners to find specific words or to ‘sound-out’ specific words. She also made laminated flashcards of the words of each story. Before the learners could leave the reading group to return to their desks to continue with class work, they had to say the word of a chosen flashcard. Caldwell and Leslie (2013:88) encourage the use of flashcards to learn sight words. Miss Smith also showed the learners the word flashcards from the story and the learner who said the word correctly could keep the flashcard for the lesson. Some learners were eager to accumulate as many word flashcards as possible. Another game played with the sight words was where one learner called out the word they had and asked for another word, for example, “I have /the/ who has /can/?”

During group reading, Miss Smith always discussed the title of the reading book and asked the learners to make predictions about the story before reading it. After reading the book (each learner generally read two pages), the learners discussed who they thought the main characters were and what the story was about. Miss Smith asked some learners to retell parts of the story. The learners were asked to locate specific words in the story. Miss Smith explained concepts such as a ‘speech bubble’, and the use of punctuation.

Miss Smith extended her top two groups by giving the learners THRASS keywords. The learners were asked to draw pictures for these words and then write the relevant spelling choice (cf. figure 5.3). The learners then ‘clicked’ the three phonemes ‘out’ (with their

fingers) and blended the word e.g. /c/a/p/ =/cap/. These two top groups also read one book per evening at home.

The other three groups received more learning support with the letter/sound correspondences of the alphabet. Miss Smith played many games (including Snap and Bingo) with the learners to improve their letter/sound correspondences. The learners in these three groups were also given more time to read their short vowel-sound books. They were allowed to choose their favourite short-vowel book and read several pages aloud. The learners in these three groups read a book in two days and sometimes in three days.

Miss Smith also read the relevant THRASS story and song with the class every week. The THRASS stories were all in the form of PowerPoints that the team of Grade 1 teachers had made. The Grade 1 teachers had animated pictures in the PowerPoints to make the story more interesting. With every new sound Miss Smith followed the same procedure of reading the related story. She would discuss the difficult vocabulary first (cf. 5.4.3.1), then read the story page-by-page, asking questions after each page. (Comprehension is discussed in detail in 5.4.5.1). Sometimes Miss Smith would ask the learners to read specific words or short sentences from the story. She always made the learners aware of capital letters and punctuation. She would always show the learners the THRASS keywords in the stories. The learners often shared their own experiences relating to specific stories. Miss Smith read the corresponding THRASS song line-by-line on her own from the 'smart board'. During the second reading, Miss Smith read one line and the learners repeated it before she read the next line. She demonstrated the actions while reading the song for a third time. The song was then played on her 'smart board' with the music and the learners sang it and did the actions.

I also observed how language (and reading) was incorporated across the curriculum, particularly during music and Mathematics lessons. When the learners went to the music teacher for their weekly music lesson, she made them read a song from her board. She read the song line-by-line first, and then the learners read it after her. The music teacher explained the meaning of words in the song (e.g., 'different' and 'fingerprints'). She highlighted these two words in colour to help the learners to remember them. She also asked the learners to give her a word that rhymes with /talk/. The learners were able to correctly respond with the word /walk/. The music teacher also used actions to help the learners remember the words.

During the Mathematics lesson, Miss Smith used terminology such as *before* and *after* which the learners were familiar with due to learning these words during the daily revision of the alphabet. She explained that the word /estimate/ means ‘a clever guess’. While doing a sum, Miss Smith used the word /equal/ repeatedly. She appeared to be aware of the fact that not all the learners understood the vocabulary used in Mathematics, so she spent more time explaining terms such as /plus/. This helped those learners who were battling to understand the Mathematics vocabulary to cope better. The importance of explaining vocabulary in Mathematics was evident.

#### **5.4.2.2 Participation of the learners**

The learners enjoyed the games that Miss Smith played with them during the group reading session. Dara was particularly fond of reading the sight words and on one occasion even managed to read a word that was upside down on the pile. Shaun enjoyed the challenge of locating sight words in the ‘words’ book (cf. Figure 5.5). The learners thoroughly enjoyed cutting and sticking (various shapes) containing sight words in their exercise books. They enjoyed folding the flaps over and then reading the hidden words (see figure 5.6).

The learners seemed more confident to participate and more eager to try decoding words during the group reading lessons. During one lesson Raul excitedly exclaimed,

“Teacher, I knew the word because I sounded it out.”

Some learners received specific learning support during the group reading lessons to help to improve their reading. Nene confused /a/ and /the/ while reading, so Miss Smith helped him with this. Jason, Tracey and Amile all read the word /sits/ as /is/ during one lesson. Miss Smith asked Jason to carefully ‘sound out’ the word. He did so and was able to correctly say the word /sits/. Instead of merely correcting the learners, Miss Smith used Jason to help the whole group see and fix their reading error.

Rachel was visibly excited on receiving a ‘proper’ reading book. She easily found the words Miss Smith asked her to find in the book but initially struggled to locate the title of the story. Miss Smith helped her with this, and she did not have the same problem again. Nosipho also enjoyed the group reading sessions and made good predictions of what the stories were about.

Dara was able to read sentences independently from the beginning of the term. Miss Smith knew this and helped to extend and improve Dara's reading ability by providing her with opportunities to read different texts. While reading the story, 'Zac the Rat' (Starfall 2002-2016), Miss Smith asked Dara to read the following sentence, which she read correctly,

"Zac had a fan."

Nosipho and Dara appeared to be the best readers in the class. Interestingly, neither of them were English Home Language speakers, Nosipho being Zulu-speaking and Dara Afrikaans-speaking.

The learners thoroughly enjoyed the shared reading lessons. The use of fun activities made reading a pleasant experience. While making "crackolates", a learner exclaimed,

"This is the best day ever!"

Nene was chosen to hold up an ingredient during the "crackolates" lesson. He is a shy little boy who is not confident in his reading but was able to participate in the lesson. He smiled the whole time that he stood holding the ingredient up.

The learners enjoyed pretending to make a gingerbread man. They then pretended to be the gingerbread man and acted out running past the various characters and climbing onto the fox's back. The learners were encouraged to participate and share their experiences during the shared reading lessons. While reading the story of 'The Gingerbread Man', the class discussed the dangers in respect of cooking (the danger of being burnt, etc.). Rachel shared that she had burnt two fingers while cooking during a camping trip.

When asked, during the interviews with the learners if they liked reading, eight of the nine learners said they did. When asked to point to a picture to describe how they felt when reading (happy face or sad face) eight of the nine learners pointed to the happy face. Jason, who did not like reading, said

"Because sometimes when you get home my mom wants to like turn my neck around."

He speaks Afrikaans at home and this was his translation of, “*My ma wil my nek omdraai.*” He went on to say that he does not like “to say the words” while reading. He indicated that he really enjoyed listening to stories. When interviewing his mother, she mentioned that at times she felt the process of homework frustrating, and referred to his lack of phonemic awareness. (This will be discussed briefly later on in the chapter on phonemic awareness - cf. 5.4.4.3).

#### **5.4.2.3 Support of the parents**

Three definite themes emerged from the parent interviews, namely; the role parents play in promoting reading at home, parent knowledge on how to help their children at home with reading homework and support from the school to help promote reading.

All the parents who were interviewed agreed that they play an important role in promoting their child’s reading at home. When asked how they support their children with reading at home, there were some similar answers, including playing board games, making sight word flashcards, borrowing books from the library and reading stories to their children. Only one parent mentioned that they also use digital applications to help with reading at home.

When asked what activities they engage in at home to promote reading, two of the responses were:

“*Ja*, we try read stories to him every evening and we’ve printed out flashcards of different furniture and things in the house, door, television and stuck it everywhere.”

“We do Scrabble. I’ve got Scrabble that I’ve used with all my daughters, which they make up words, so it’s a Scrabble game for them. We also have little books. We go to the book shops and we get the number 1 readers and we go through that.”

Some parents were very resourceful in supporting reading at home, such as using cereal boxes to read words. Using the family members’ names also made reading relevant in the child’s life.

“We cut out the magazine cartoons...sometimes I would even cut the boxes of cereal and make her read just to make it easy for her to start learning the words and I would write my

family members' names down to let her read them and start learning how to read and write those words.”

Several parents mentioned that they would have liked to help more with their child's reading at home but they lacked the time and battled to get into a routine. Some parents stated that they have older children who assisted with the reading at home. Another parent bought books with CDs for her child to read,

“We buy books with CDs though because we don't have time.”

“With our busy lives we can (*promote reading*) but the problem like I said is the routine.”

There were other parents who followed a strict routine at home for reading. A father stated,

“Every night I read them a bed time story, Monday to Thursday, four nights a week. Come Friday it is open gates, they can watch TV, they can play computer games, do whatever they like.”

Most of the parents followed a more casual approach to promoting reading. However, one mom (with the help of her mother) created a home programme for her child to follow from an early age, as follows,

“My mom taught her the basic alphabet. We had sponge letters and my mom would associate /A/ with a friend's name, which is Annabel. So she'd see the /A/ and say to her that is /A/ for Annabel so we just carried on with that. Every time when we would say something we'd show her a letter, link it to another word or a name so that's how she would remember the letters.”

This mom also used sight word flashcards found on the internet to teach her daughter to read. She also used her daughter's competitive spirit and joy of conquering challenges to teach her to read, as explained below.

“So I've made those flashcards for her and I would introduce one word at a time, although I left all of them, even bigger words on her cupboard, she could see them anytime she wanted

to. And then I made like just a line on the cupboard and I said to her the words underneath the line are the words you know already. So for her it was a challenge to see how many words she can move from the top to the bottom. So we'd take a word and I'll sound it for her and she'd learn the words like that. So eventually she would take these words, I one day walked into her room and she's taken these flashcards and she'd paste them next to each other and make a sentence. So although there was like /two/ instead of /to/, she realised that is /to/ and she took them and place them into sentences and start reading."

The reading homework provided by the school was done daily with all the learners but not always under the parents' supervision. Some families made use of older siblings (mentioned earlier), others of the domestic worker, while some parents did the reading homework with their children.

All the parents interviewed were very happy with how their children were being taught to read by the class teacher. One mom was surprised at how quickly her son, who could not read before entering Grade 1, had learned to read.

"The second week I think it was, he was able to read. It was amazing!"

Most of the parents expected their child to be able to read different texts independently by the end of Grade 1, and if there were any problems, they expected to be informed immediately by the class teacher.

Two parents had older children who had battled with reading, so they were very aware of the importance of providing support at home and of feedback and communication with the class teacher. In respect of feedback a parent commented,

"To have good communication with me. If there's anything that she's struggling with for her [teacher] to guide me, give me some things for her [child] to do extra, and that's all really. I trust the teacher that if there's a problem, she'll let me know."

On providing support a parent stated,

“We read with them, we let them read by themselves. Whenever they are facing a problem of the word we try to explain what does that word means and then we do help them a lot at home.”

Only one parent mentioned that she was a bit anxious about her son learning to read because he had attended an Afrikaans pre-school and spoke Afrikaans as a home language. She found the process of her son learning to reading “frustrating” and was puzzled by her son’s inability to quickly grasp reading. She had met with Miss Smith who was not concerned about the child’s reading. The mom said Miss Smith advised her to carry on with what she was doing. The mom said that she had been working consistently with her child and that his reading had started to improve.

The parents interviewed all understood the importance of reading and the role they can play to promote reading at home. Time constraints were very relevant for many of the parents who worked long hours. All the parents interviewed wanted the best possible outcome regarding reading for their children and were happy with their children’s progress at the time of the interviews.

### **5.4.3 Vocabulary**

As stated in chapter 2 (2.4.1.4) there are two different types of vocabulary, namely oral and reading. In Grade 1 the initial vocabulary instruction is oral, due to the fact that most learners are unable to read. As soon as the learners can read, reading vocabulary instruction can begin. Miss Smith used news time, sight words, Bible stories, pictures, songs, shared reading and group reading to teach vocabulary incidentally and also directly.

#### **5.4.3.1 The role of the teacher**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter (cf. 5.4.2.1), every week when the new sight words were introduced the teacher read them from the ‘smart board’ and their meanings were discussed. The words were used in the context of an oral sentence to help ensure understanding. Miss Smith would always try to make the words relevant to the learners by showing them a picture of the word and in some instances, relating the word to the South African context or their own lives. For example, when the word /fox/ was discussed, Miss Smith showed the learners



a picture of a fox and asked if anyone knew of a similar animal in South Africa. A learner correctly answered that it was a jackal.

Scanlon et al. (2010:256) believe that learners learn the meanings of many words incidentally through conversation, and by being read to. Miss Smith taught a great deal of vocabulary incidentally (e.g., homonyms such as ‘sea’, and ‘see’, and general vocabulary such as ‘kit’ and ‘quilt’). When a word ‘came up’ that the learners did not understand or that was new to them during a literacy lesson, Miss Smith would spend time explaining the word. Her explanations would often include a drawing by her, or a picture accessed from the internet. Miss Smith also tried to expand the Grade 1’s vocabulary by intentionally introducing new words to them during her reading instruction lessons. Coyne et al. (2009:1-3) describe this type of instruction as ‘embedded vocabulary instruction’ (cf. Chapter 2: 2.4.1.4).

When reading a Bible story one morning, Miss Smith introduced the words /drought/ and /famine/. She explained the current drought in South Africa and what it means in the lives of many families. This resulted in a class discussion and the meaningful use and understanding of the words ‘drought’ and ‘famine’. Walpole and McKenna (2007:87) strongly support this kind of vocabulary instruction connected to a story together with a meaningful discussion. The discussion that ensued is described in the section on learner participation (cf. 5.4.3.2).

Before the class engaged in shared reading, Miss Smith introduced the new vocabulary and discussed it. A good example of this was when the class read in Shared Reading the story of the Little Red Hen, Miss Smith introduced the vocabulary (‘wheat’, ‘mill’ etc.) to the learners before reading the story. She showed the learners what /wheat/ is, using pictures from the internet and displaying them on her ‘smart board’. She also showed the learners pictures of a mill and indicated what happens there. Miss Smith spent a lot of time making sure that she identified the vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to her Grade 1 learners and also looked for pictures to help her to explain the words.

Before the introduction of each THRASS song and story, the vocabulary was thoroughly discussed too. A good example of this was with the /f/ sound (for /fish/) when the word /Caribbean/ was introduced. This word would have been unknown to most Grade 1 learners, so a thorough explanation of it was done. The word /fete/ was also discussed (during a THRASS lesson) and made relevant to the Grade 1 learners’ lives by discussing local

community fetes, including the fete organised by Blue Primary. Peregoy and Boyle (2013:229) support the idea of using real life experiences to make words more meaningful to the learners especially in respect of ESL learners. Miss Smith was also careful to explain words such as /bone/ to the class, understanding that words which are used by English Home Language users are not necessarily used and understood by learners who do not have English as their home language.

Miss Smith also made use of actions to introduce prepositions. This helped the learners to understand different prepositions such as 'next to' and 'in front of'. She used as many different ways as possible (including pictures and movement) to help the learners understand the new vocabulary and to extend their existing vocabulary. It is evident that Miss Smith understood the learners in her class had varying levels of vocabulary and did her best to help improve each learner's vocabulary (Walpole & McKenna 2007:87; Coyne et al. 2009:2).

#### **5.4.3.2 Participation of the learners**

During Group Reading some of the learners would ask Miss Smith the meaning of certain words. A good example of this was when Dara asked Miss Smith to explain the word /tut/ in their group reader.

As discussed earlier, the Bible stories introduced new vocabulary. When discussing the meaning of the words /famine/ and /drought/ one little boy shared that his uncle was unable to plant any seeds and was battling to get enough food, so this little boy's family were helping him. The little boy did not speak English as his home language but fully understood what a drought and famine were due to the experience he had with his uncle.

Another little boy brought some 'wheat' to the class the day the story of The Little Red Hen was being read. The learner had picked a weed off the school field that he thought resembled wheat. Although it was not wheat, the fact that this boy had thought about the story and had taken time to find what he thought was wheat was very rewarding for Miss Smith, who remarked in her journal;

“After break, Adam (*pseudonym*) even came to show me ‘wheat’ he had found on the field. It was very rewarding to see that they enjoyed the vocabulary and prediction part of the story.”

It was interesting to note that some learners knew what they wanted to say but lacked the vocabulary to adequately express it. This was the case in respect of learners from all three language groups, English, Afrikaans and isiZulu, and was not limited to learners who spoke Afrikaans or isiZulu as a home language.

Tracey, who speaks English at home, battled to explain that a bat is an animal, and instead tried to explain what it looks like. She also had problems explaining that ginger is a spice. She knew what she wanted to say but lacked the adequate vocabulary to explain it. Miss Smith helped her by modelling how to describe ginger by using a complete and coherent sentence. Dara, who speaks Afrikaans as her home language, was very interested in learning new vocabulary and often asked the meaning of words, as described earlier in this chapter. She battled to think of the word /kennel/ during Group Reading one day and referred to it as a “dog house”, which she was translating from her knowledge of Afrikaans. She was, however, the only learner in the class who gave the correct word, /shadow/ when Miss Smith asked the class various leading questions. Amile experienced problems explaining what a village is when asked to during a phonics lesson. She speaks Zulu as her home language. Miss Smith explained the term and showed the class a picture of a village.

Miss Smith also helped the learners to use the correct tenses when speaking, for example

“We **swimmed** in the pool.”

Miss Smith replied, “Yes, when you **swam** in the pool.”

Miss Smith created an environment where the learners felt comfortable to ask questions, allowing them to increase their vocabularies.

#### **5.4.3.3 Support of the parents**

One parent briefly mentioned that she informally discusses objects in the house while doing the cleaning. She used this time to discuss the name and colour of various objects.

“For me, just maybe when we are cleaning I ask what colour is this, then they’ll tell me...”

A father stated that he spends many hours reading and discussing stories with his child, thereby helping to promote an increase in the child’s vocabulary. One mother used her child’s enjoyment of reading the subtitles on television to help develop reading and vocabulary. This mom mentioned that her daughter enjoys the challenge of reading the subtitles and of learning new words.

All of the parents interviewed engaged in discussions with their children when reading. These informal discussions help to promote the children’s vocabulary as they discover the meanings and use of new words within various contexts.

A mother bought books for her daughter consisting of various levels within a story. She explained:

“So they’ve got a whole series of books, it’s about thirty books in there, thin books where they have a short liner at the top that the adult can read and then the kid makes up the rest of the story of the picture or you can read the story at the bottom, so it’s been growing with us.”

These books could be used to enhance the child’s vocabulary through discussion and by inventing new stories or aspects of a story.

It would be beneficial to the child to mention the importance of vocabulary to the parents at the information evening, along with some practical advice on how to improve it.

#### **5.4.4 Phonemic awareness**

*Phonemic awareness* is the understanding that speech sounds (called phonemes) can be manipulated in a variety of ways (Carnine et al. 2010:50). Being able to hear and manipulate phonemes is an integral part of learning to read. Learners who lack phonemic awareness are at a great risk of developing reading problems later (Shanker & Cockrum 2009:15).

#### 5.4.4.1 The role of the teacher

Miss Smith taught phonemic awareness using rhyming, initial sound recognition (the final and middle sounds to follow later on), phoneme blending and segmenting and counting the number of sounds in words (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:7-8). She helped the learners who needed extra learning support in small group reading. During this time she focused on initial sound identification, and phoneme segmenting and blending with the different reading groups. She worked at a slower pace with the groups who needed it and extended the time spent on the other groups by providing more opportunities to segment and blend phonemes (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:8).

Miss Smith also deleted phonemes and substituted phonemes with the top reading group, e.g., /bat/, take away the /b/ is /at/ or /bat/, take away the /b/ and put a /r/ in its place, and it becomes /rat/. This was also a useful exercise in recognising and manipulating initial sounds (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:7). The top two reading groups also built words with laminated picture/letter cards. (see figure 5.8). During this exercise the learners received the opportunity to blend sounds into words (Walpole & McKenna 2007:35).



**Figure 5.8: Building words with picture/letter cards**

When Miss Smith taught the class phonics, she incorporated phonemic awareness activities. The learners regularly ‘clicked’ (with their fingers) the number of sounds in the words, e.g., /c/a/t/. This is an example of using the sense of touch (tactile) as part of a multi-sensory approach to learning (Gunning 2014:243). Miss Smith started with three sounds. Some learners battled to click for various reasons, such as poor or undeveloped fine motor skills,

but they pretended to click their fingers. Miss Smith noted this and asked the learners to clap their hands or hop for some of the words. When a digraph was introduced, such as /ch/ in the word /chat/, the learners got confused and said there were four sounds. This was possibly due to the fact that they saw the word on the ‘smart board’ first. It may have been easier if the word was not seen but rather only heard.

Miss Smith added to the phoneme segmenting by asking the learners to write the different letters on their ‘dry erase boards’ in boxes drawn by themselves. She used a technique similar to the Elkonin boxes (explained in chapter 2.4.1.2). The learners tapped on the letters on their ‘dry erase boards’ as they said the sounds, instead of sliding objects into the boxes for each sound. When segmenting and blending phonemes the learners were given words with different short vowel sounds, e.g., /b/i/g/ and /c/a/n/.

Another regular phonemic awareness activity was to identify beginning (initial) sounds (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:7). Sometimes Miss Smith had pictures of various objects on her ‘smart board’ and the learners had to categorise them according to beginning sounds (Gillet et al. 2012:138). At other times the learners had to provide their own objects for a specific beginning sound, e.g., Miss Smith checked to see if the learners understood the /c/ sound by asking them to give her other examples of words that start with /c/. One learner said, “cranberry”, so Miss Smith explained what a cranberry is. This phonemic awareness activity also helped to increase the learners’ vocabulary, as not all the learners were familiar with a cranberry. Miss Smith gradually introduced the final and middle sounds as the learners improved in their phonemic awareness. During Group Reading, Miss Smith used laminated work cards to revise initial sound recognition and identification.



**Figure 5.9: Example of an ‘initial’ sound activity used during Group Reading**

Miss Smith incorporated writing into some of her phonemic awareness activities, e.g., she used the letters /l/, /t/, /h/, /b/ which the learners were learning to write, and she asked them to identify pictures on her ‘smart board’ that started with these letters. Afterwards the learners drew pictures in their ‘busy books’ and Miss Smith and I labelled the pictures. (see Figure 5.10).



**Figure 5.10: Writing activity linked to initial sound identification**

Another regular phonemic awareness activity was to find rhyming words. Gunning (2014:206) encourages the teaching of the concept of rhyme to learners. Miss Smith gave the learners the following comprehensive explanation of why words rhyme,

“I want you to have a look at each word [*pointing to words on board*]. What does it end in? /a/t/, /at/. What does /rat/ end in? /at/ What does /fat/ end in? /at/. What does /sat/ end in? /at/ What does /mat/ end in? /at/. The first letter is different but each word sounds the same at the end. It ends with the same sounds /a/t/, so that is why they rhyme because they sound the same at the end. Do they all start with the same letter? [*The learners also answered, ‘No’*]. A word does not rhyme because it starts with the same letter, it rhymes because it sounds the same at the end.”

Miss Smith showed the learners several words on the ‘smart board’, and the learners had to pick out the words that rhyme (e.g., cat, sat, mat, fat). She frequently said several rhyming words with an incorrect word and the learners had to identify the incorrect word. Other lessons included Miss Smith providing several rhyming words orally and the learners had to then contribute with their own words. During Group Reading, Miss Smith used laminated

cards of rhyming words to revise the concept. The learners used these cards to identify and sort rhyming words. Huebner (2009:90) advocates the use of small groups especially for ESL learners to consolidate concepts taught during ‘big class’ time.

#### **5.4.4.2 Participation of the learners**

The learners enjoyed the phonemic awareness activities. However, the learners observed showed a clear difference in phonemic awareness. Nene struggled with hearing and manipulating sounds. He was also slow to learn the sounds of the alphabet. When the class started reading their first books, Nene struggled and needed a great deal of help when he came across a word he did not know. Miss Smith had to repeatedly show him how to decode the word by modelling how to ‘sound it out’. Shanker and Cockrum (2009:15) warn that there exists a correlation between learners with poor phonemic awareness and struggling with reading. Jason initially battled with phoneme blending but improved by the end of the term. On the other end of the spectrum was Dara, who was able to manipulate sounds with ease. She had good phonemic awareness, and was reading before she entered Grade 1.

As mentioned earlier, the learners became aware of the particular routine of contributing words with specific initial sounds. They would anticipate this part of the lesson, and many learners gave more than one word when called to answer.

The learners enjoyed the different games that Miss Smith prepared for them during their Group Reading time. Those who were more competitive tried to finish their words or activity first as they were eager to move on to the next activity. Learners such as Nene, who are shy and battle with phonemic awareness, participated more during the Group Reading activities. This also gave these learners more time to consolidate certain activities and concepts, such as rhyming. The learners became excited when Miss Smith added a new activity, and thoroughly enjoyed using clothes pegs to show initial sounds on the laminated cards. Using clothes pegs was a clever way of helping the learners to develop their fine motor skills.

#### **5.4.4.3 Support of the parents**

Only one mom (Jason’s) mentioned that she was “frustrated” with her child’s lack of phonemic awareness, but was spending extra time at home showing him how to segment and blend words. This mom exclaimed,



“I tell him to spell it out (s/a/t/). What is mom saying? /Ben/ is what the child replies. It’s not even nearly similar.”

Although this mom was concerned about her child’s progress with being able to hear and manipulate sounds (phonemic awareness) she was happy that she had seen some improvement. The mom explained to me that she was not the “teacher type”, and she felt she lacked patience at times. However, she was clearly dedicated to helping her son achieve his best and was very involved with his homework and with keeping updated about his schoolwork.

From talking to this mom, it was evident that the school and teacher needed to consider a workshop or information booklet on how the parents can help develop their child’s phonemic awareness at home.

A father mentioned that he had a set of very old Dr. Seuss books (A5) that he reads with his children at night. He and his children thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of saying the words and sentences correctly. These types of exercises help the children to become aware of phonemes and how much fun it is to manipulate them. He stated, “Some of them are quite tongue twisters...” Cockrum & Shanker (2013:7) support the notion of using books such as the Dr. Seuss books to help develop phonemic awareness.

#### **5.4.5 Comprehension**

Comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:221). The learners should play an active role in constructing meaning when reading a text, for example from the experiences they have had and can relate to (Gunning 2014:366).

##### **5.4.5.1 The role of the teacher**

Miss Smith read many stories to the learners during the whole class teaching sessions to help them grow in their knowledge and which will assist with reading comprehension (Carnine et al. 117, 122). She made use of an instructional framework called ‘Before, During and After’ (BDA) to promote comprehension (cf. chapter 2.4.6.1). BDA helps to activate prior knowledge in order to interact with the text through questioning, visualising, making

inferences, organising and re-creating new ideas (Stebick & Dain 2007:2-14). The DBE (2011b:16-18) CAPS document on English Home Language supports the notion of BDA. It describes the aspects of comprehension as literal, reorganisation, inferential, evaluation and appreciation.

Miss Smith activated the learners' prior knowledge by linking stories to their own real life experiences. This was evident on many occasions, but a good example was the previously mentioned occasion of a Bible story on famine and a drought. The little boy who spoke of his uncle's situation activated his knowledge of a drought and accordingly understood the concepts of drought and famine in the Bible story. Gunning (2014:403) affirms that prior knowledge is integral to comprehension and believes it is even more important than decoding.

While reading a variety of texts (especially during 'Big Book' shared reading) the learners always had the opportunity to ask and to answer questions before, during and after reading. This was also evident during the THRASS lessons while reading the THRASS story. The learners were encouraged to make predictions about the story and then after reading, to discuss their predictions. Gunning (2014:375) supports the use of predictions where he states that predicting allows the learners to activate their prior knowledge and also to compare their predictions with what really happened. Miss Smith's initial questions generally checked the learners' literal comprehension of the story (DBE 2011b:16-17), for example,

"How many spots does the dog have?" or "Who are the main characters in this story?"

She would then progress to asking more difficult questions. For example, she included organisation (comprehension) by asking the learners to name the characters the Little Red Hen spoke to and the order in which this happened (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:245). She gave the learners very explicit instructions and explained clearly how she expected them to answer her questions. Below is an account of this:

"Now that you've heard the story a few times, who can tell me the order of the four animals. They all answered '*Not I*'. Who can tell me the order of who answered it first, then second, then third and fourth or last? So who answered the hen first?"

This way of questioning the learners provided them with a good framework of how to answer Miss Smith's questions about the story and helped them to organise their thoughts logically and sequentially. To ensure that all the learners participated, Miss Smith revised the answers in chorus with the entire class. She followed this procedure with other stories e.g., The Gingerbread Man, Spot the Dog etc.

Miss Smith usually asked several learners to retell the story in their own words. Retelling a story indicates the learner's comprehension of the story and can be used to help to improve their understanding of the story (Gunning 2014:417). Miss Smith guided the learners again so as to provide a clear example of what she required in the future when they would be asked to retell a story or part of a story. Miss Smith modelled how to retell a story step-by-step several times during the observation period. She provided opportunities for the learners to practise the skill of retelling a story and corrected the learners when they skipped important parts of the story. Gillet et al. (2012:190) strongly advocate the use of teacher modelling to show the learners which aspects of the story are important and what teachers want the learners to be able to do when retelling a story.

Miss Smith would ask the learners how they would solve a particular problem in a story. This required higher-order thinking and often tested inferential comprehension (DBE 2011b:17). Miss Smith had a wonderful way of making the learners think deeply about the stories and of applying the lessons learnt to real life situations. A good example of this is the story of The Red Hen. Miss Smith engaged in the following discussion with the class after they had read the story, and discussed it in detail and retold aspects of it,

“I would like to bake something and who will help me?”

Only one or two learners initially responded that they would help. A few more learners responded that they would help Miss Smith when they remembered the outcome of the story. Miss Smith then asked,

“Why are you going to help me bake?”

Several learners were given the opportunity to answer. The answers reflected varying degrees of comprehension. One learner said,

“Because you’re the teacher.”

She had not linked what Miss Smith was doing (baking) to the story (The Little Red Hen baked).

Another learner replied,

“Because I want to help you eat it.”

The learner remembered the story and the lesson that the animals learned (if you don’t help bake you don’t get to enjoy eating the baked treats later). This little girl showed a deep understanding of the story.

Miss Smith then went on to ask the learners to think further.

“What do we need if we want to bake something?”

A learner immediately replied that a recipe was needed. From here the recipe for ‘crackolates’ was discussed and the learners helped make ‘crackolates’ (cf. 5.4.2.1 & 5.4.2.2).

Miss Smith used the same aspects of comprehension during Small Group Reading. During these sessions she was able to ask more learners direct questions, varying from literal to inferential questions. She asked the learners many questions, including how they would respond if they were in the same situation as various characters from different stories. She also asked the learners to identify their favourite part of any given story.

I noted that vocabulary and comprehension often go hand in hand. If a learner does not understand a word from a story, such as ‘fete’ or ‘famine’, he or she will not fully understand the story. Miss Smith was aware of this fact and made sure that the learners knew the vocabulary of the stories they were listening to and reading. The learners were also encouraged to ask many questions. Gunning (2014:338) states that learners who battle with vocabulary (or have a limited vocabulary) will experience problems, particularly with reading comprehension, as they reach the higher grades.

#### **5.4.5.2 Participation of the learners**

The learners asked many questions about the stories during the Shared Reading and Small Group Reading sessions. They also asked questions during the THRASS stories and songs. Small Group Work allows all the learners to actively engage in the lesson and to receive the learning support that they may need with comprehension (Goldenberg 2010:27).

Some learners only managed to answer the more literal questions. Miss Smith consistently modelled what she expected from the learners and also prompted them when necessary, helping them to think on a deeper level.

The learners seemed to enjoy retelling parts of the stories. Dara retold 'The Gingerbread Man' very well in a logical and sequential order, showing understanding. When doing Group Reading, Raul asked what a 'pit' is. He needed to know the meaning of this word to fully understand the story, as it was about certain animals falling into a 'pit'.

When discussing the story of 'The Ugly Duckling', Dara battled to answer a question because she did not have the vocabulary to do so. She did not know the word 'reflection' and thus experienced problems in answering the question related to that word.

I became aware of the role that concentration plays in comprehension. A little boy was very distracted one day, and subsequently could not answer the questions about what had happened in the story.

Some learners (such as Amile and Dara) were very enthusiastic and regularly put their hands up to answer questions about the story. Other learners (such as Rachel and Nene) seemed more comfortable to ask questions and engage in discussions about the story during Small Group Reading.

During the Small Group Reading sessions, the questions were more tailored to suit the ability of the readers. The top reading group were asked more difficult questions. The bottom reading groups were asked more literal questions and were prompted more in order to help them to provide answers. Miss Smith always tried to relate aspects of a story or character to the learners' lives. To illustrate, when the learners were reading about a panda bear, she showed them a stick of bamboo and compared it to sugarcane, which they are familiar with.

During Group Reading most of the learners were able to make good predictions about the story. Nosipho enjoyed this aspect of Group Reading and often made good predictions.

When I interviewed the nine selected Grade 1's they all said that they enjoyed listening to stories, which was evident during my classroom observations. The learners were eager to answer the questions and to participate in discussions about the various stories. Miss Smith provided them with many opportunities to improve their comprehension skills.

#### **5.4.5.3 Support of the parents**

During my interviews with the selected parents it was evident that they understood the importance of being able to comprehend stories or other texts. One mom declared,

“She just reads word, word, word, and she doesn't always comprehend the sentence.”

Her goal for her child was that she could understand what she is reading.

The skill of retelling a story in a logical and sequential manner was reinforced by some parents at home. One mom shared,

“She must be able to tell me from the beginning to the end...”

Another family stated,

“After we've finished reading together we test them.”

One parent said that her child was eager to predict what the story was about and to check her predictions,

“You know what, mummy this is what's going to happen in this book .. and she will still tell me, You see I told you.”

A father indicated that he chooses books from the library that relate to their lives. He used stories particularly on divorce to help his children understand their home situation. He stated,

“I get a lot of reactions from them because they say well that’s mommy and that’s how we are and it has helped put them at ease with their situation.”

It was evident from the interviews with the parents that they ultimately wanted reading to enrich their children’s lives in some way or other. They knew the importance of reading for comprehension and how reading can impact their daily lives.

#### **5.4.6 Summary**

It is clear that Miss Smith knew the DBE policy document on English Home Language (DBE 2011b) and how to implement it in her daily lessons. She provided her Grade 1 learners with a literacy- and ‘print-rich’ environment (Peregoy & Boyle 2013:332). The learners were eager to learn to read and were delighted when they received their first books. The parents all had their children’s best interests at heart. They were all confident of the teacher’s ability to teach, and had only positive things to say about her. They expected the school to provide resources (books and reading programmes) to help their children to learn to read. They also expected the teacher to communicate with them if there were any problems.

### **5.5 MISS SMITH’S JOURNEY**

Miss Smith began the school year feeling a bit nervous about my observing her reading instruction lessons, but she soon got used to my presence. We had many informal conversations and discussions about reading. She felt a great sense of responsibility regarding the task of teaching Grade 1 learners to read. Below is an account of her journey, which includes some of her journal entries and insights from the last two semi-formal interviews that I conducted with her.

Miss Smith made sure that her initial reading instruction lessons were brief. She explained in her journal.

“The learners had a very short attention span.”

This observation by Miss Smith allowed her to make her lessons shorter and to have more breaks between them. During the breaks she would get the learners to do various activities,

such as singing songs with actions, stretching, and following instructions (e.g., learners were asked to touch their left knee with their right hand). Miss Smith clearly understood that the concentration span of a beginner Grade 1 learner is generally limited and that it would be futile to teach a group of distracted or tired learners.

She noted again,

“The lessons need to be simple and short as the learners become distracted very easily and quickly.”

She was pleased with the progress the learners had been making by the end of January.

“The children are grasping their reading words quickly.”

It was evident to me that Miss Smith enjoys her job as a Grade 1 teacher. She often wrote in her journal how she enjoyed certain aspects of a lesson, as follows

“I enjoyed today’s lesson with shared reading.”

“I enjoy working with a smaller group and find it more successful in identifying how learners are reading and grasping the concept of reading.”

When she did the lesson on making ‘crackolates’, she noted,

“Doing activities like this do bond you as a class and I enjoyed their enthusiasm.”

“I am really enjoying seeing their little characters develop as they settle into school and a reading routine.”

Although she enjoyed her lessons, Miss Smith also faced many challenges, such as

“I am battling to keep up with everything that needs to be covered...”



As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Miss Smith is the Grade Head of Grade 1 and has many additional responsibilities. Some of her responsibilities included planning the work for the grade, making sure all the worksheets and assessments are ready and photocopied, organizing weekly meetings with her Grade 1 teachers, coordinating a raffle, and extra-mural sport. At times she felt overwhelmed and this reflected in some of her journal entries, such as

“It is very challenging to keep up with all the demands. I find myself doing quite a bit after hours at home just to try and keep things in order.”

“Today I feel very overwhelmed by the pressure and the daily demands.”

During the second interview that I conducted with her, we discussed the fact that Miss Smith is very busy, and that all the administrative work that she has to do can be very time-consuming. She also had to collect money for a school fundraiser, for a Grade fundraiser, for class and individual photos, an outing, and Friday ice-creams. Furthermore, she had to collect reply slips for the sporting activity that she coordinates; and expected a visit from a local educational psychologist who was observing a learner.

Although Miss Smith had all the above to contend with, she still felt confident that she was doing her best as a teacher. She was pleased with the overall progress of her Grade 1 learners, and was only concerned about three of them. These three learners had not made as much progress as was expected, but Miss Smith had spoken to their parents and was giving them extra learning support during Small Group Reading. When asked what she was doing to help these three learners, she replied;

“I’m trying to consolidate what we’ve learnt in class; so in a smaller group I am going over again the different phonemes, the different letter boxes, anything that I covered in class; and then also I am checking their little homework packets and words again. So, basically whatever I’ve done in the classroom but on a much smaller scale.”

She later added, in the third interview (at the end of fieldwork), “I’m trying to take them more on my own, to spend a bit more time with them individually.”

Miss Smith felt that she was capable of helping the learners in her class who just needed a little extra support to read better, but she was not equipped to deal with specific and more serious reading problems.

## **5.6 CONCLUSION**

Miss Smith knew the CAPS English Home Language Policy document well. Her reading instruction programme for the first term included all of the important components of reading, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, sight words, vocabulary and comprehension (Dooner 2012:31; NRP 2000). Shanker and Cockrum (2009:1) state that teachers who understand the key components of reading instruction and how to apply them are well-equipped to promote the development of the good reading of their learners. Miss Smith acknowledged that the above policy document suggested guidelines for reading groups, but she did not feel that they worked within the context of her classroom. She had more small groups and read much more than the suggested guidelines.

The use of small groups for differentiated instruction was a good way to meet the needs of all Miss Smith's learners as she could plan specific instruction for them (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:207-2009; Gillet et al. 2012:19; Tracey & Morrow 2012:129). Archer and Hughes (2011:9) also support grouping learners for instruction and postulate that it is, "the most effective and efficient approach to teaching basic skills".

Miss Smith used a variety of resources 'smartboard', THRASS charts, flashcards, 'dry erase boards' etc.) to help her learners during her class lessons and small group lessons. Walpole and McKenna (2007) support the use of 'dry erase boards' to help the learners in reading instruction during small group instruction.

Miss Smith enjoyed a good relationship with the learners in her class. She made reading an exciting adventure. She provided the learners with many opportunities to practice their reading (Shanker & Cockrum 2009:2). She was aware of the fact that not all the learners have access to books at home, so she provided a 'print-rich' environment with an extensive reading corner in her classroom (Peregoy & Boyle 2013:332; Reutzel & Cooter: 2011:238). The only improvement could be to add more picture books.

She was in constant contact with the parents and provided them with support and suggestions on how they could help their child where necessary. Miss Smith clearly understood the important role that the parents play in their children's reading development (Lemmer 2013:27-29). The parents who were interviewed were confident of her ability to teach their children and were all very happy with how Miss Smith was teaching them. It was evident that Miss Smith is extremely passionate about her job.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH, FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this study was to investigate how the reading development of beginner readers can be supported in a primary school in the Umlazi District of KwaZulu Natal. In chapter one I discussed the background to the study (cf. par 1.1). I discussed the state of reading in South Africa and the importance of all learners being able to read, as well as the significance of teacher knowledge in helping to promote reading. I formulated the problem and the aims and described the design of the ethnographic study (qualitative research) used to explore how a Grade 1 teacher promotes the development of reading in a class of beginner readers.

In this concluding chapter I will present a summary of the literature review and the ethnographic investigation with regards to the problem formulation and the aims. I will briefly restate the key findings, and will make recommendations for the improvement of practice. I will note the limitations of the study, outline final conclusions, and suggest areas for future research.

#### **6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

An overview of the literature review of the ethnographic study will be discussed in the ensuing paragraphs. The aims of the study were indicated in chapter 1, section 1.4, and were presented to address the main research question, namely How can the reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of KwaZulu Natal be promoted? This research question was sub-divided into the following research questions:

- What theoretical perspectives inform reading and reading instruction and how can effective instructional strategies for beginner readers be described? How are the diverse needs of learners from different language backgrounds being catered for during reading instruction? (Chapter two).

- What policy and procedures guide the instruction of reading in South African primary schools with special reference to language diversity and the Language in Education Policy? How can the five main components of reading as informed by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) English Home Language policy be incorporated into daily reading instruction? (Chapter three).
- What daily activities do the teacher and learners engage in that promote the reading development of beginner readers in a Grade 1 classroom in the Umlazi District, KwaZulu Natal as observed during an ethnographic study? (Chapters four and five).
- Based on the literature study and the ethnographic inquiry, what recommendations can be made to promote the reading development of beginner readers? (Chapter 6).

### **6.2.1 The literature review**

The literature review was discussed thoroughly in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 described the theoretical perspectives that inform reading instruction. The two main methods of reading instruction, namely phonics and the whole word approach were analysed and discussed in order to understand how they contribute to the teacher's instructional practices. Five essential components to good reading instruction emerged and were also discussed in chapter 2. Chapter 3 focused on reading instruction within the context of South Africa. The various policy documents were reviewed to determine the role they play in reading instruction. The CAPS English Home Language policy document was thoroughly reviewed as it informs reading instruction in South Africa.

Chapter 2 addressed the following research questions: What theoretical perspectives inform reading and reading instruction and how can effective instructional strategies for beginner readers be described? How are the diverse needs of learners from different language backgrounds catered for during reading instruction? Two main approaches to teach reading emerged, namely, phonics and the whole language approach. These two approaches have been vigorously debated throughout the last century by many researchers (Shanahan 2006:1). Proponents of the whole language approach view reading from a constructivist point of view (cf. chapter 2; 2.2.1) (Tracey & Morrow 2012:59). The whole language movement was

influenced by the theorists John Dewey (1859-1952), Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) (cf. chapter 2, 2.2.1.1) (Goodman 1989:116). Supporters of the whole language approach to reading instruction strongly believe that language should not be broken up into basic letters or a combination of letters which are then used to decode words. They view language as a comprehensive system in which words work together in context to create meaning (Huang 2014: 71). Phonics is not taught in isolation but rather within the context of actual reading and writing experiences. Advocates of the whole language approach believe that phonics programmes are largely unscientific. They reject the use of letter/sound relationships as they state that these are irregular and unpredictable and do not promote or produce meaningful language. The learners are therefore encouraged to discover the alphabetic principle through writing, resulting in invented spelling while transitioning towards conventional spelling (cf. chapter 2; 2.2.1) (Goodman 1986:37-39). Phonics is a method of reading instruction that makes a child aware of the connections between the sounds (phonemes) of the spoken words and the letters (graphemes) that represent the sounds in the written form (Scanlon et al. 2010:77) (cf. chapter 2: 2.2.3). Supporters of the code-emphasis (phonics) believe that children learn to read by understanding the letter/sound correspondence, from their smallest parts to the whole (Carnine et al. 2010:41). Jeanne Chall was at the forefront of advocating the use of phonics as the best method of reading instruction. She maintained that direct instruction in phonics was integral to reading achievement (Chall 1989:525-532) (cf. chapter 2: 2.3). After years of debating which method of reading instruction was superior, the National Reading Panel (NRP 2000) concluded that a 'balanced' approach to reading instruction, incorporating five main components, namely phonemic awareness (cf. 2.4.1.2), phonics instruction (cf. 2.4.1.3), vocabulary instruction (cf. 2.4.1.4), reading fluency (cf. 2.4.1.5) and reading comprehension (cf. 2.4.1.6) was the best approach to reading instruction (cf. chapter 2: 2.3.1). The NRP (2000) further suggested that direct, explicit and systematic instruction should be used to teach the five main components of reading (cf. 2.4.1.1). Considering the diverse classrooms throughout the world and particularly in South Africa, a discussion was undertaken in chapter 2 on how to cater for the diverse needs of learners within the five main components of reading (cf. chapter 2: 2.5). Learners who do not speak English as their home language (ESL) learners benefit from instruction in the five components of reading with a few adjustments. The use of differentiated instruction within small groups was found to be highly beneficial to ESL learners (Peregoy & Boyle 2013:215) (cf. 2.5.3.1). The teachers need to encourage all the learners to participate in the lessons, and to ask questions. The teachers can use the learners'

prior knowledge to incorporate the new concepts, use experiences familiar to the learners, provide multiple opportunities for the learners to use what they have learnt during a lesson, provide a 'print rich' environment, and constantly and consistently model what is expected from the learners (cf. 2.5.3).

In Chapter 3 the researcher addressed the following research questions: What policy and procedures guide the instruction of reading in South African primary schools with special reference to language diversity and the Language in Education Policy? How can the five main components of reading informed by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) English Home Language policy be incorporated into daily reading instruction? The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996a) (cf. 3.2.1), the South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996b) (cf. 3.2.2) and the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (1997) (cf. 3.2.3) have shaped language in education and provide the legal framework for schooling (cf. chapter 3: 3.1). All the aforementioned policies work together to ensure that no learner is discriminated against on the basis of, among others, race, culture or language. These policies advocate and promote equal access to education (cf. chapter 3: 3.2.3). The LiEP encourages the use of home language for instruction. However, for many South African learners this is not a reality. Many learners are taught in an additional language (Lemmer 2010:233). This can increase the risk of the learners experiencing barriers to learning, and the teachers need to be mindful of this (Lessing & Mahabeer 2007:140) (cf. chapter 3: 3.6.1). The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) has, among others, the goal of being sensitive towards factors including poverty, race, gender, language and disability (cf. 3.4). The CAPS English Home Language policy (DBE 2011b) strongly advocates the use of language across the curriculum (cf. 3.4.1). It 'breaks' language instruction up into skills including, namely listening and speaking (cf. 3.4.1.1, reading and phonics (cf. chapter 3: 3.4.1.2), handwriting (cf. chapter 3: 3.4.1.2) and writing (cf. 3.4.1.2). The CAPS English Home Language policy document explains what each of the aforementioned skills entails, and suggests guidelines for their implementation (cf. 3.4.1.2). This document further breaks down the teaching of reading into the following five components: phonemic awareness, word recognition (sight words and phonics), comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. The abovementioned components of reading are defined and guidelines with examples are provided for the teacher to use in instruction (DBE 2011b:14-18). The CAPS English Home Language policy document provides the teachers with a term-by-term overview of which language skills should be taught (DBE 2011b:23-30). The document provides the teacher with the clear and

precise requirements of what is expected from the learners. This is presented term-by-term with suggested contact times for each of the skills, and lists of recommended resources and texts are provided (DBE 2011b:55-79). The CAPS English Home Language policy document provides the teachers with ample information on how to successfully incorporate and implement the five main components of reading into their daily instruction.

### **6.2.2 The ethnographic study**

The ethnographic enquiry addressed the third research question, namely which daily activities do the teacher and learners engage in that promote the reading development of beginner readers in a Grade 1 classroom in the Umlazi district, Kwazulu Natal? (chapters 4 and 5). The research design of the ethnographic study was outlined in chapter 1, section 1.5.2, and comprehensively described in chapter 4. An ethnographic enquiry was used to gather data on how reading instruction is done in a Grade 1 classroom. The study was conducted at a public primary school in Kwazulu Natal (cf. 4.3.1) that was selected by means of convenience and purposive sampling. One Grade 1 teacher (cf. 4.3.2.1) and the Head of Department of the Foundation Phase (cf. 4.3.2.1) were selected to participate in this study. Nine learners (cf. 4.3.2.2) and their parents (cf. 4.3.2.3) were also purposefully selected as participants in the study based on their home languages and the progress made with reading. The teacher was observed for three to five hours per week during the first school term in 2016. The data were organised under themes that emerged during the literature review, supported by the CAPS English Home Language policy document; namely reading (including sight words) (cf. 5.4.2), phonics (Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills [THRASS] and alphabet knowledge) (cf. 5.4.1), vocabulary (cf. 5.4.3), phonemic awareness (cf. 5.4.4) and comprehension (cf. 5.4.5). The data were reported on using each of the abovementioned themes, but also included how the themes are implemented and experienced according to the teacher, the learners and the parents under the following headings: the role of the teacher, learner participation and parent support. The findings from the interviews with the selected teacher, Head of Department of the Foundation Phase, selected learners and selected parents were presented in a narrative format in Chapter 5. Participation was voluntary and permission was granted to conduct the study by the Kwazulu Natal Department of Education (cf. Appendix C) with the full support of the principal (cf. Appendix B) of the selected school. The selected teacher (cf. Appendix D) and the Head of Department of the Foundation Phase (cf. Appendix E) were given letters of consent to sign. All the parents (cf. Appendix F)



of the learners in the selected Grade 1 class signed letters of consent and nine sets of selected parents (cf. Appendix G) also participated willingly. The study was explained to the selected class of Grade 1 learners and they each signed an assent form (cf. Appendix H). Bidvest Paperplus (Pty.) Ltd. gave their written permission to use photos of their Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS) charts and the Grade 1 teacher's guide (cf. Appendix P).

### **6.3 KEY FINDINGS**

The findings of the ethnographic study on which daily activities the teacher and the learners engage in that promote the reading development of the beginner readers in a Grade 1 class were presented in Chapter 5. A summary of the key findings will be discussed.

The teacher's belief (theoretical perspective) about how children learn to read influenced her instructional practices. Miss Smith strongly believed that phonics was an integral part of a good reading instruction programme. She was trained extensively in a phonics programme called THRASS (cf. 4.3.1.1) and incorporated it into her daily reading instruction lessons. Her knowledge of phonics enabled her to provide clear, direct and systematic instruction (cf. 5.4.1). The Head of Department of the Foundation Phase supported the use of THRASS as part of the school's reading instruction programme, and believed that it was beneficial for all learners.

Miss Smith was able to cater for the diverse needs of all her learners through differentiated instruction in small group lessons. She revised the concepts in the small groups that had been learned during the whole class teaching according to the main components of reading, namely reading (including sight words) (cf. 5.4.2), phonics (Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills [THRASS] and alphabet knowledge) (cf. 5.4.1), vocabulary (cf. 5.4.3), phonemic awareness (cf. 5.4.4) and comprehension (cf. 5.4.5). Miss Smith provided different exercises for each group's needs. The learners who were coping better were given extra exercises to further improve their reading (cf. 5.4.2.1). Small group instruction also allowed the shy or introvert learners to actively participate in the lessons. Miss Smith provided a 'print rich' environment, as she knew that not all the learners had access to books at home

(cf. Figure 5.4). She also maintained contact with the parents of the learners in her class in order to offer extra learning support where necessary.

Miss Smith knew the CAPS English Home Language policy document well. Her experience as a Grade 1 teacher allowed her to understand that some of the suggestions in the policy document were not practical for her class. An example is the number of suggested reading groups and time spent in group reading (DBE 2011b:56-57). Miss Smith spent more time per day reading in groups and had more groups with fewer learners (cf. 5.4.2.1).

Miss Smith knew the five main components of reading (DBE 2011b:14) (reading [including sight words], phonics vocabulary, phonemic awareness and comprehension) and she knew how to incorporate them into her daily reading instruction, often using more than one component during a lesson. For example, during a phonics lesson the learners learnt a sound (phoneme), listened to a story, discussed vocabulary, identified sight words, answered questions about the story, and retold the story or parts of it (cf. 5.4.1.1 & 5.4.2.1). She did not focus on fluency in the first term as the learners were beginner readers. She provided many opportunities for the learners to practise and revise what they had learnt. She modelled what she expected from the learners by means of demonstration and ‘think-alouds’. Miss Smith’s knowledge of how to teach reading played an important role in the success of her lessons (cf. 2.1). It was clear that she had spent many hours planning her lessons to ensure that she taught reading in a fun and interesting way. Miss Smith consistently provided direct, explicit and systematic instruction (cf. 2.4.1.1) within the aforementioned five components of reading (cf. 5.4.1; 5.4.2; 5.4.3; 5.4.4 & 5.4.5). She also ensured that language was taught across the curriculum, and that it was not limited to the reading instruction lessons only (cf. 5.4.2.1); language (including reading) was considered an integral part of every lesson. She used incidental and planned opportunities to promote reading.

Miss Smith encouraged a multi-sensory approach to reading instruction, particularly during lessons on phonics (cf. 5.4.1.1). She understood that the learners needed to move around (kinaesthetic), touch (tactile), hear (auditory) and see (visual) during reading instruction lessons. She provided the learners with multiple opportunities to use all their senses during reading instruction, e.g., the learners used their bodies to make the letters of the alphabet, they danced, sang songs, acted out parts of a story, listened to stories, and moved pictures on the “smart board”.

## **6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF PRACTICE**

The final research question was: Based on the literature study and the ethnographic inquiry, what recommendations can be made to promote the reading development of beginner readers? (chapter 6). Guided by the literature review and the ethnographic study, the following recommendations to promote the reading development of beginner readers are suggested:

- a) Teacher content and pedagogical knowledge: Teachers should be knowledgeable of the methods (theoretical framework) used to teach beginner reading and how they influence the daily instructional practices (Lyon & Weiser 2009:475). Teacher training faculties should be aware of the fact that a thorough understanding of the two main methods of reading instruction - phonics and the whole word approach - need to be included as part of the coursework of student teachers. The teachers should be knowledgeable about the five main components of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, sight words and phonics, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency) and how to apply them in their daily lessons (DBE 2011b:14; Shanker & Cockrum 2009:1).
- b) Staff development: Novice teachers should be supported at their schools by their more knowledgeable and experienced colleagues. They should engage in sessions of sharing ideas and practical examples with each other that promote beginner reading. The teachers should be provided with the opportunities to attend professional development courses to improve their knowledge of reading instruction.
- c) Keeping journals: The teachers should be encouraged to keep journals of their reading instruction experiences. This will enable them to reflect on both their challenges and successes, and to adapt their lessons accordingly.
- d) Catering for diversity: In South Africa, in one classroom, there are learners with different home languages and from different cultural backgrounds. The teacher needs to be mindful of this when planning his/her reading lessons. The use of differentiated instruction in small groups is beneficial to all learners (Cockrum & Shanker 2013:207-2009; Gillet et al. 2012: 19; Tracey & Morrow 2012:129; Archer & Hughes 2011:9). The teacher should also provide clear examples of what she expects from the learners by means of modelling and 'think-alouds'

(Walpole & McKenna 2007:58; Scanlon et al. 2010: 19-20). Furthermore, the teacher must provide all the learners with various kinds of support (scaffolding) in order that the learner may achieve more and work towards becoming more independent (Woolfolk 2010:46, 47, 50).

- e) 'Print rich' environment: Providing a 'print-rich' environment for all the learners is essential in promoting reading. This should include books, charts, literacy cards and literacy games. Not all the learners have access to books (or any other form of print) at home, so the classroom needs to have a variety of books for learners to read during class and to take home. The available books should include picture books, fiction and non-fiction (Singh 2009:94-96). Beginner readers should be presented with many activities and opportunities (within the five main components of reading) at school to promote reading (cf. 5.4.1.1; 5.4.2.1; 5.4.3.1; 5.4.4.1; 5.4.5.1).
- f) Pedagogical leadership: The Head of Department of the Foundation Phase plays an important role in promoting reading. Her role includes, namely identifying a programme that works well to successfully teach reading, offering support to teachers, and to the parents, and determining what more can be done to promote reading. In this respect it is important that the Head of the Foundation Phase enjoys the support of the principal in terms of providing resources (books, computer software, etc.) to help to promote reading.
- g) Language and educational policy: Various governmental policies work together to support and promote the cultural and language diversity in South Africa, including the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996a), the South African Schools Act (SASA) (RSA 1996b) and the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (DoE 1997). It is important that the teachers know these policies and understand how they have shaped the national curriculum, particularly as regards language.
- h) Curriculum: The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) English Home Language (2011b) gives clear guidelines on what should be taught to promote reading in the Foundation Phase. More workshops to disseminate the content of this document would be helpful to teachers. Workshops could be facilitated by teachers in the school or the local community who understand the document, by knowledgeable members of the teacher unions or by officials from the provincial department. Although there are some examples of how to teach reading according to the five main components of reading as stated in the CAPS

English Home Language Policy document (DBE 2011b:14), namely phonemic awareness, word recognition (sight words and phonics), comprehension, vocabulary and fluency, more practical examples would be beneficial to teachers. There are very few examples of how to teach phonics and sight words, in particular in the CAPS English Home Language Policy document (DBE 2011b:15-16). Not all the schools have the money to buy a phonics programme, so the Department of Education should consider making a phonics programme available to those who choose to use it.

- i) Literacy enrichment at home: As learning does not occur in a vacuum but within many social contexts, it is important that the parents are included in the process of learning to read. They need to understand how the school teaches reading so that they can help their children at home (Lemmer 2013:27-29). Workshops for parents should be held at least once per year, to give the parents practical examples of how to promote reading at home. The teachers should regularly communicate with the parents. The parents need to be informed promptly if their children are experiencing any problems in learning to read.

## **6.5 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

In order to promote the reading of Grade 1 learners the following suggestions are made as areas for further research:

- a) A study to determine if in-service teacher training on the five components of reading (phonemic awareness, sight words and phonics, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency) can improve reading in the Foundation Phase of a school. This study could be conducted at one school or several schools, for the purposes of comparison. This study could be conducted at schools (and areas) with different socio-economic statuses.
- b) Considering the numbers of learners who are struggling to read, a study conducted on how to reduce reading problems in the Foundation Phase would be valuable.
- c) A study with practical examples on how to help learners who are struggling to read would be highly beneficial to the teachers. Often teachers can identify the problems that the learners have but do not have the knowledge or skills to help these learners.

- d) A study of how ESL learners are supported in a school where they are learning in an additional language is recommended, considering that many learners in South Africa are not learning in their home language.
- e) Due to the fact that learning occurs in more than one context (home, school and community) a study on the promotion of beginner reading through home-school-community partnerships is recommended.
- f) Likewise, a study on the effect of providing parents with workshops and group sessions on how to promote literacy (reading) at home is recommended.

## **6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

When considering the research findings of this ethnographic study, the limitations need to be carefully considered. This study involved only one school, a Grade 1 class, and one teacher; so the findings cannot be generalized. However, the aim of an ethnographic study is to provide an in-depth, rich and holistic understanding of the participants' views and actions, as well as the kind of environment they inhabit, by means of detailed observations and interviews, and not to generalize the conclusions.

## **6.7 FINAL CONCLUSIONS**

The importance of learning to read is indisputable. The teachers' knowledge of how to teach reading plays an important role in learning to read. Likewise, the teachers' knowledge of how to cater for learners from different language backgrounds is equally important. Many learners in South Africa struggle with reading, and need to be supported by their teachers and their parents if they are to overcome these difficulties. The schools play an important role in promoting reading. Providing a 'print-rich' environment, with access to resources that promote reading is integral to the process of learning to read.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**PROOF OF REGISTRATION**

**APPENDIX B**  
**PERMISSION LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL OF THE SELECTED SCHOOL**

Request for permission to conduct research at Amanzimtoti Primary School

23 October 2015

Title: Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal

Jacqueline Stoltz

0826062046

[stoltz01@mweb.co.za](mailto:stoltz01@mweb.co.za)

Dear Mr Lanyon

I am currently busy with my MEd (Didactics) studies at UNISA. The title of my Dissertation is:

Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal.

This research is conducted under the supervision of Prof Eleanor Lemmer at UNISA (Department of Education). Prof E. M. Lemmer can be contacted at [lemmeem@unisa.ac.za](mailto:lemmeem@unisa.ac.za).

I would like to invite your school to participate in this research. A selected Grade 1 teacher, all the children in her class, selected parents from the class and the Head of Department of the Foundation Phase will be invited to participate in this study. The aim of this study is to understand how the teacher (as part of the Foundation Phase) promotes reading development of beginner readers in her Grade 1 class consisting of children from different cultures and home languages.

The study will entail daily observation sessions of reading instruction lessons from Monday to Friday for approximately 10 weeks, commencing from the end of January 2016. The weekly time needed will be approximately three hours and will be divided into thirty to forty-five minute sessions per day. During these observation sessions I will make extensive notes and will also actively participate in some of the lessons. I will also conduct interviews with the selected teacher, Grade 1 children, parents and the Head of Department of the Foundation Phase.

The benefits of this study are

- Contribution towards professional teacher development
- Strengthen collaboration between parents and teacher to promote reading

- Support for parents to help promote reading at home

There will be no risks involved to any of the participants. Participation is entirely voluntary and all information will be kept confidential. The families', teacher and school's name will not be revealed. No monetary rewards are given to participants. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any point without being penalised. Participants are expected to indicate whether they agree or disagree to participate by completing a consent form. Permission will be obtained from learners' parents. As required, the results of the study will be made available to the school. The results of the study will be discussed at school in a special information sharing session after this study has been concluded. The results of the research may be published in a scientific journal or presented at a conference.

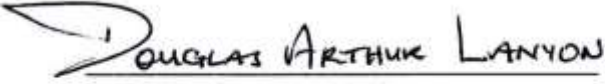
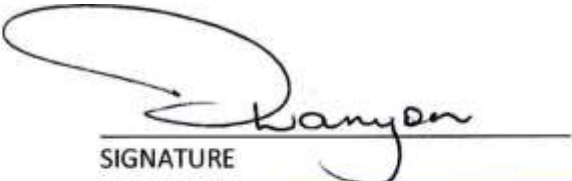

Your support and willingness to participate in this research is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Stoltz

## INFORMED CONSENT BY THE PRINCIPAL

I have been given the chance to read this consent form and I understand the information about this study. Questions I wanted to ask about this study have been answered. My signature indicates full support for this study.

 PRINCIPAL (name in print)	 SIGNATURE
DATE: <u>23</u> / <u>10</u> / <u>2015</u>	



## APPENDIX C

### LETTER FROM KWAZULU NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



education

Department:  
Education  
**PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

Enquiries: Nomangisi Ngubane

Tel: 033 392 1004

Ref: 2/4/8/558

Mrs J Stoltz  
19 Good Hope Way  
ST WINIFREDS  
4126

Dear Mrs Stoltz

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"PROMOTING READING DEVELOPMENT OF BEGINNER READERS IN THE UMLAZI DISTRICT OF KWAZULU-NATAL"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 28 October 2015 to 31 November 2016.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Umlazi District

**Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD**  
**Head of Department: Education**  
**Date: 27 October 2015**

#### KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL: Private Bag X 9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa ...dedicated to service and performance  
PHYSICAL: 247 Burger Street, Anton Lembede House, Pietermaritzburg, 3201. Tel. 033 392 1004 ~~beyond the call of duty~~  
EMAIL ADDRESS: [kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za) / [Nomangisi.Ngubane@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:Nomangisi.Ngubane@kzndoe.gov.za)  
CALL CENTRE: 0860 596 363; Fax: 033 392 1203 WEBSITE: [www.kzndoe.gov.za](http://www.kzndoe.gov.za)

## APPENDIX D

### LETTER OF CONSENT – GRADE 1 TEACHER

#### **Request for permission to conduct research**

Title: **Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal**

Jacqueline Stoltz

0826062046

[stoltz01@mweb.co.za](mailto:stoltz01@mweb.co.za)

Dear Teacher

I am currently busy with my MEd (Didactics) studies at UNISA. The title of my dissertation is: **Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal.**

This research is conducted under the supervision of Prof Eleanor Lemmer at UNISA (Department of Education). Prof E. M. Lemmer can be contacted at [lemmeem@unisa.ac.za](mailto:lemmeem@unisa.ac.za).

I would like to invite you to participate in this research. The aim of this study is to understand how you promote reading development of beginner readers in your Grade 1 class consisting of children from different cultures and home languages.

If you agree to participate in this study it will entail daily observation sessions of your reading instruction lessons from Monday to Friday for approximately 10 weeks. The weekly time envisaged for this will be approximately three hours and will be divided into thirty to forty-five minute sessions per day. During these observation sessions I will make extensive notes and will also actively participate in some of your lessons as and how you deem it necessary. I will ask you to keep a diary in which you will record and reflect on your experiences regarding reading instruction. I will collect the diary on a Friday to make notes and will return it to you on the Monday of each week. I will interview you at the beginning of the study, during the middle of the study and after the 10 weeks have concluded. Interview questions will be provided to you a week in advance.

The possible benefits of participating in this study are:

- Professional and personal growth and development
- Gaining insight into how you can further promote reading in your class
- Strengthened collaboration between you and the parents to promote reading

There are no foreseeable risks involved to you participating in this study. Participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point without being penalised. All information will be kept confidential. I will use a pseudonym and not your name throughout this study to ensure your anonymity. You will have access to all the collected data throughout this study. You will be given time to read the transcripts of the interviews I conduct with you and are at liberty to change any information, should you wish to.

The results of the study will be discussed with you first and then at school in a special information sharing session after this study has been concluded. The results of the research may be published in a scientific journal or presented at a conference.

You will not receive any monetary rewards for participating in this study.

Your support and willingness to participate in this research is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Stoltz

**INFORMED CONSENT BY THE TEACHER**

I have been given the chance to read this consent form and I understand the information about this study. Questions I wanted to ask about this study have been answered. My signature indicates full support for this study.

_____	_____	_____
TEACHER (NAME IN FULL)	SIGNATURE	DATE

## APPENDIX E

### LETTER OF CONSENT - HEAD OF DEPARTMENT – FOUNDATION PHASE

Title: **Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal**

Jacqueline Stoltz

0826062046

[stoltz01@mweb.co.za](mailto:stoltz01@mweb.co.za)

Dear HOD

I am currently busy with my MEd (Didactics) studies at UNISA. The title of my dissertation is: **Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal.**

This research is conducted under the supervision of Prof Eleanor Lemmer at UNISA (Department of Education). Prof E. M. Lemmer can be contacted at [lemmeem@unisa.ac.za](mailto:lemmeem@unisa.ac.za).

I would like to invite you to participate in this research. The aim of this study is to understand how the teacher (as part of the Foundation Phase) promotes reading development of beginner readers in her Grade 1 class consisting of children from different cultures and home languages.

If you agree to participate in this study it will entail an interview with you where we will discuss how reading is promoted in the Foundation Phase at Amanzimtoti Primary School.

The possible benefits of this study are

- Collaboration to promote reading development throughout the Foundation Phase
- Contribution towards professional teacher development
- Strengthened home-school collaboration to promote reading development

There are no foreseeable risks involved to you participating in this study. Participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point without being penalised. All information will be kept confidential. I will use a pseudonym and not your name throughout this study to ensure your anonymity. You will be given time to read the transcript of the interview I conduct with you and are at liberty to change any information, should you wish to.

The results of the study will be discussed at school in a special information sharing session after this study has been concluded. The results of the research may be published in a scientific journal or presented at a conference.

You will not receive any monetary rewards for participating in this study.

Your support and willingness to participate in this research is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Stoltz

**INFORMED CONSENT BY THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT – FOUNDATION PHASE**

I have been given the chance to read this consent form and I understand the information about this study. Questions I wanted to ask about this study have been answered. My signature indicates full support for this study.

_____	_____	_____
TEACHER (NAME IN FULL)	SIGNATURE	DATE

Yours sincerely  
Jacqueline Stoltz

## **APPENDIX F**

### **PARENT CONSENT LETTER**

#### **LETTER OF CONSENT**

#### **PARENTAL CONSENT FOR PARENT AND/OR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**Title: Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal**

Dear parent

I am currently busy with my MEd (Didactics) studies at UNISA. The title of my dissertation is: **Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal.** This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA, the Kwazulu Natal Department of Education and permission for the study has been given by the principal of Amanzimtoti Primary School.

The purpose of this form is to invite you and your child to participate in my research and to provide you with information that may affect your decision as to participate in this research study. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

The study will entail daily observation sessions of reading instruction lessons from Monday to Friday for approximately 10 weeks, commencing from the end of January 2016. During these observation sessions I will make extensive notes and will also actively participate in some of the lessons. Some of the activities I will include your child in are:

- Singing and dancing to songs that promote reading
- Reading stories to the children
- Listening to children reading
- Talking informally to children about how they are experiencing learning to read

All informal conversations that I will have with your child will be done in an unobtrusive manner that will not intimidate or embarrass your child. I will select several children to conduct a more in-depth but still informal interview with. During this interview I will use hand puppets to help your child discuss his/her experience of learning to read. This will be done privately in a room other than the child's classroom. You may attend this informal interview as an observer should you wish to.

I will also conduct an interview with a few selected parents. Selected parents will be invited to a private informal interview where we will discuss:

- What you do at home to promote reading development
- How you have experienced your child learning to read

- Any challenges you might have encountered during the process of your child learning to read
- Any successes and insights you have gained during the process of your child learning to read
- Any suggestions or ideas you would like to make which will strengthen the home-school connection to further promote reading

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. The possible benefits of participation are:

- Greater understanding of how your child learns to read
- Support with any challenges you may be facing regarding your child's reading development
- Strengthened home-school connections

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time. You can agree to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

Neither you nor your child or any family member will receive any type of payment for participating in this study.

Your family's privacy and the confidentiality of all data will be protected by not using your family or your child's name in the data collected as well as the report. The anonymous data will be allocated to parent or child one, two, etc. Only the researcher and the Grade 1 class teacher participating in this study will have access to this data. Parents who are interviewed will have access to their interview transcript and may make changes if needed. The results of the study will be discussed at school in a special information sharing session after this study has been concluded. The data resulting from your child's or your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate it with your child, or with your family's participation in any study.

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher, **Jacqueline Stoltz (0826062046)** or send an email to **stoltz01@mweb.co.za** for any questions or you can contact the study supervisor: Prof EM Lemmer, email: [lemmeem@unisa.ac.za](mailto:lemmeem@unisa.ac.za).

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your child or you to participate in the study you may discontinue your participation at any time. You will be given a copy of this document.

---

Printed Name/s of Child/ren

---

Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian

---

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

---

Date



## APPENDIX G

### LETTER OF CONSENT FOR THE SELECTED PARENT INTERVIEWS

#### PARENT INVITATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW

**Title: Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal**

Dear parent

I am currently busy with my MEd (Didactics) studies at UNISA. The title of my dissertation is:

**Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal.**

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA, the Kwazulu Natal Department of Education and permission for the study has been given by the principal of Amanzimtoti Primary School.

The purpose of this form is to invite you to participate in a private interview. During this informal interview we will discuss:

- What you do at home to promote reading development
- How you have experienced your child learning to read
- Any challenges you might have encountered during the process of your child learning to read
- Any successes and insights you have gained during the process of your child learning to read
- Any suggestions or ideas you would like to make which will strengthen the home-school connection to further promote reading

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. The possible benefits of participation are:

- Greater understanding of how your child learns to read
- Support with any challenges you may be facing regarding your child's reading development
- Strengthened home-school connections

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point without being penalised. All information will be kept confidential. I will allocate the interview to parent one,

two etc. You will be given time to read the transcript of the interview I conduct with you and are at liberty to change any information, should you wish to.

The results of the study will be discussed at school in a special information sharing session after this study has been concluded. The results of the research may be published in a scientific journal or presented at a conference.

You will not receive any monetary rewards for participating in this study.

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher, **Jacqueline Stoltz (0826062046)** or send an email to **stoltz01@mweb.co.za** for any questions or you can contact the study supervisor: Prof EM Lemmer, email: [lemmeem@unisa.ac.za](mailto:lemmeem@unisa.ac.za).

Your support and willingness to participate in this research is greatly appreciated.

Kind regards  
Jacqueline Stoltz  
Researcher

---

PARENT (NAME IN FULL)

---

SIGNATURE

---

DATE

## APPENDIX H

### CHILD ASSENT LETTER

Researcher: Jacqueline Stoltz

Contact details: [stoltz01@mweb.co.za](mailto:stoltz01@mweb.co.za)

Cell: 0826062046

Title of Research: Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu Natal

UNISA

Supervisor: Prof EM Lemmer

[lemmeem@unisa.ac.za](mailto:lemmeem@unisa.ac.za)

#### LETTER OF ASSENT

Dear

My name is Mrs Stoltz and this is a picture of me



more about

I am a student at a big university, and want to learn how children learn to read.

I am going to come visit your classroom every day for 10 weeks. I am going to help your teacher while she teaches you how to read. I want to invite you to take part in these lessons. During these lessons you will:

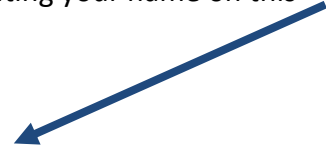
- Sing songs
- Dance
- Read books
- Tell stories
- Listen to stories
- Play with puppets
- Write
- Talk to me



You can talk to me and read to me only if you want to. If you don't want to talk to me or read to me that is fine. I might ask to speak to your mommy and daddy. I promise to answer all your questions about what we are doing and why we are doing it. I also promise to keep your name a secret so nobody will know what you have said to me or how you read to me. I will give you a copy of this letter.



If you want to talk to me or read to me, you can tell me so by writing your name on this line



\_\_\_\_\_

Mommy and Daddy must also sign this letter to say that they agree.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Mommy's name

Daddy's name

This is how I write my name: \_\_\_\_\_

This is how I sign my name:

This is today's date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **APPENDIX I**

### **GUIDE/SCHEDULE FOR TEACHER INTERVIEWS**

#### **Semi-structured interview: Interview guide**

**Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is the importance of teaching reading?
2. How do you plan the classroom environment (e.g. reading corner, print rich environment) to promote reading?
3. What theoretical perspectives inform your reading instruction (e.g. phonics, whole language approach)?
4. How do you plan your reading instruction lessons to include all learners, especially learners from different language backgrounds?
5. What instructional methods (teaching methods) do you include in reading instruction lessons?
6. What activities do you include in your lessons to promote reading?
7. How do you incorporate the English Home Language Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) during reading instruction?
8. What learning support do you offer to children who are struggling to read?
9. What support do you offer to parents who have children who are struggling to read?
10. What support does the school (principal or Head of Department in the Foundation Phase) offer you to promote reading development?

**APPENDIX J**  
**GUIDE/SCHEDULE FOR INTERVIEW WITH THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT –**  
**FOUNDATION PHASE**

**Semi-structured interview: Interview guide**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is the importance of teaching reading?
2. How do you promote reading in the Foundation Phase?
3. What reading programme does the school use and why?
4. What learning support do you offer to children who are struggling to read in the Foundation Phase?
5. What support do you offer to parents who have children who are struggling to read?

## **APPENDIX K**

### **GUIDE/SCHEDULE FOR PARENT/S INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW**

#### **Semi-structured interview: Interview guide**

**Parent/s:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Would you like to tell me about your family and where your child fits into the family?
2. Can you tell me about your educational experiences including school and tertiary education?
3. Did your child attend a registered pre-school?
4. Could your child read before they went to Grade 1?
5. What do you expect from your child regarding reading at the end of Grade 1?
6. What do you expect from the teacher while your child learns how to read?
7. What do you expect from the school while your child learns how to read?
8. Do you think parents can help promote reading at home?
9. What literacy activities do you as a family do to help promote reading at home?
10. Who does homework with your child?
11. How do you help your child with his/her reading homework?
12. Do you belong to the local library?
13. Does your child have access to different kinds of books at home?

**APPENDIX L**  
**GUIDE/SCHEDULE FOR INTERVIEW WITH SELECTED GRADE 1 CHILDREN**

**Informal conversational: Interview guide**

**Child:**\_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you like “big school”?
2. What is your favourite thing to do at school?
3. Is reading fun?
4. How do you feel when you read? (show children a happy or sad face picture they point to)
5. Do you have a favourite story or book? (If yes, what is it)
6. Do you like reading?
7. Who helps you at home with your homework?
8. Do you have books at home?
9. Do you go to the library?
10. Do you like listening to stories?
11. Does someone read to you at night before you go to bed? (If yes, who?)
12. Who is your favourite adult to read with and why?



**APPENDIX M**  
**OBSERVATION GUIDE/SCHEDULE – TEACHER**

**Observing Teacher during reading instruction lessons**

**Session:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. What does the teacher do to keep children engaged in the lesson?
2. What activities does the teacher include in reading instruction lessons?
3. How does the teacher incorporate the English Home Language Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) guidelines in her reading instruction activities?
4. What teaching methods (or instructional strategies) does the teacher use during reading instruction?
5. How does the teacher cater for the diverse needs of the children in the class during (and after) reading instruction lessons?

**APPENDIX N**  
**OBSERVATION GUIDE/SCHEDULE - CHILDREN**

**Observing Children's Interaction during reading instruction lessons**

**Session:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Child/ren:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Number of participants in the lesson:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. The participant's willingness to engage in the lesson
2. Participant's response to activities (level of interest and participation)
3. Knowledge of the alphabet (alphabetic principle), concepts of print, phonological awareness (including phonemic awareness) and phonics
4. Participant's vocabulary use during the lesson
5. Any stress or anxiety experienced by the child

## APPENDIX O

### UNISA ETHICAL CLEARANCE



#### COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

18 November 2015

Ref # 2015/11/18/45490732/37/MC

Student #: Mrs JM Stoltz

Student Number #:45490732

Dear Mrs Stoltz

**Decision: Ethics Approval**

**Researcher:** Mrs JM Stoltz  
Tel: +2731 916 6080  
Email: [Stoltz01@mweb.co.za](mailto:Stoltz01@mweb.co.za)

**Supervisor:** Prof E.M Lemmer  
College of Education  
Department of Educational Foundations  
Tel: +2712 460 5484  
Email: [lemmeem@unisa.ac.za](mailto:lemmeem@unisa.ac.za)

**Proposal:** Promoting reading development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of KwaZulu Natal

**Qualification:** M Ed in Didactics

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted for the duration of the research.

*The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee on 18 November 2015.*

*The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:*

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.*
  - 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the College of Education Ethics Review Committee.*
- An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the*



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Pretter Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane  
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa  
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*existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.*

- 3) *The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.*

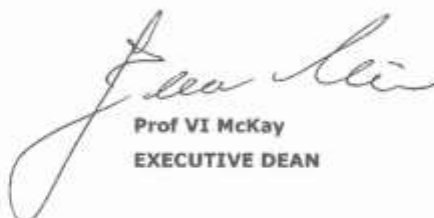
**Note:**

The reference number **2015/11/18/45490732/37/MC** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication [e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters] with the intended research participants, as well as with the College of Education RERC.

Kind regards,



**Dr M Claassens**  
**CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC**



**Prof VI McKay**  
**EXECUTIVE DEAN**



University of South Africa  
Pretorius Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane  
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**APPENDIX P**  
**LETTER OF PERMISSION - THRASS**



SSC Group Service  
6 Pencil Park, Croxley Close,  
Off Lower, Main Reef Road  
Heriotdale Ext. 15, Germiston, South Africa  
PO Box 40754  
Cleveland, 2022  
Tel: +27 (0)11 677 0000  
Fax: +27 (0)11 677 0018  
E-mail: [infojhb@silveray.co.za](mailto:infojhb@silveray.co.za)  
[www.silveray.co.za](http://www.silveray.co.za)

23 September 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Silveray Stationery Co, a Division of Bidvest Paperplus (PTY) Ltd, gives Permission to Jacqueline Stoltz, to use pictures from the THRASS charts and Grade 1 Teacher's manual.

Quid pro quo, once Jacqueline's dissertation is completed and marked – Promoting development of beginner readers in the Umlazi District of Kwa Zulu Natal, it is agreed, Silveray Stationery Co, can utilize Jacqui's research with reference to THRASS.

Silveray Stationery Co, wish Jacqui everything of the best for her dissertation and look forward to her completed paper.

Kind Regards



**Sharon Miller** | THRASS Brand Manager | Silveray Stationery Company  
A division of Bidvest Paperplus (Pty) Limited  
T: +27 (011) 677 0000 | F: +27 (011) 677 0018  
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